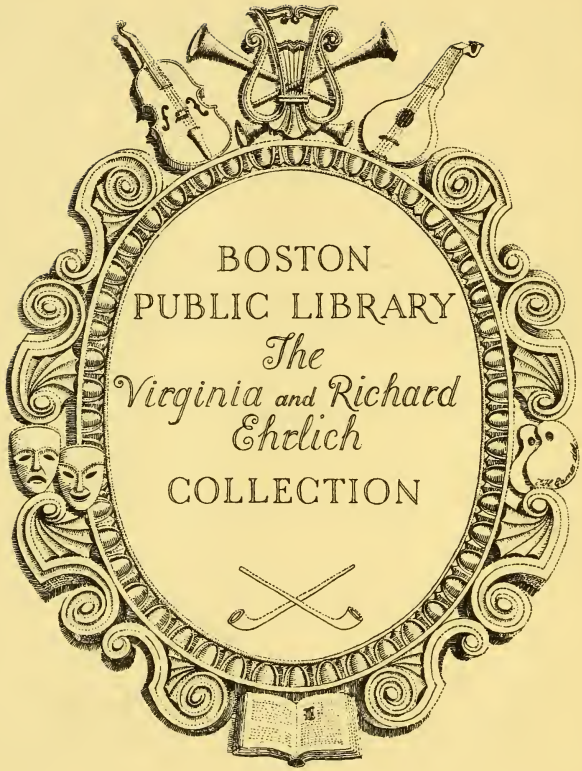
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DOM MODESTE DREW A GIGANTIC SABRE FROM ITS IRON SCABBARD AND, BRANDISHING IT IN THE AIR, CRIED, "ATTENTION!"

THE WORKS

OF

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

THE FORTY-FIVE GUARDSMEN

NEW YORK
THE CENTURY CO.
1909

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INTRODUCTION.

1585–1586.

A SEQUEL does not always bring with it a sense of satisfaction and completeness. While the preceding story may be continued successfully, the sequel demands new phases or new characters which divert the purpose of the original plot or outweigh its value. But *The Forty-Five Guardsmen* is a logical and satisfying sequel to *La Dame de Monsoreau* from more than one aspect. It is the third and last of the Valois romances, the first being *Marguerite de Valois*, which, however, stands a little apart from the other two. These last are both concerned with the reign of Henry III.; they follow the evil star of the Duc d'Anjou to its setting; they watch the star of Henry IV. begin to rise; and they narrate the doings of the unrivalled jester, Chicot.

In *La Dame de Monsoreau* we read of the heroic death of Bussy d'Amboise. Some seven or eight years have elapsed, leaving of his name only a memory. But in the heart of his mistress, Diane, the memory is cherished as a holy vow of vengeance which transforms her entire life. From the passionate, loving woman of former days she has become cold, hard, and impassive, living only for the sake of vengeance. She is still beautiful enough to quicken in the forgetful D'Anjou's breast the ashes of an earlier desire — and to awaken, despite herself, an unrequited love in a young courtier's heart. The manner in which she makes of D'Anjou's passion an instrument of vengeance is perfect in its dramatic ideals. As to the historical accuracy of the episode we cannot state further than that D'Anjou actually died at Château Thierry in a sudden and mysterious manner.

Another dramatic touch in connection with this episode is

the figure of Catherine de Médicis, the great royal poisoner, by the bedside of her last hope for the Valois line, watching his life go out through the very means she had employed so often against others.

Let us look briefly with Dumas at the career of the disappointed and despicable François:

"Those of our readers who have been willing to turn over the pages of *Marguerite de Valois* and *La Dame de Monsoreau* are already acquainted with M. le Duc d'Anjou, that jealous, egotistical, ambitious, and impatient prince, who, born so near the throne, to which each event seemed to draw him nearer, had never been able to wait with patience until death should clear the way. So at first he had coveted the throne of Navarre under Charles IX., then that of Charles IX. himself, and finally that of France, occupied by his brother Henry, ex-King of Poland, who had worn two crowns, to the jealousy of his brother, who had never been able to secure one. For a time he had turned his eyes towards England, governed by a woman, and in order to have the throne he had asked the woman in marriage, although she was called Elizabeth and was twenty years older than he. At this point fate had begun to smile on him, if it would have been a smile of fate to marry the proud daughter of Henry VIII. He who all his life in his forward desires had not been able to succeed even in defending his liberty; who had seen killed, perhaps even had killed, his favorites, La Mole and Coconnas, and basely sacrificed Bussy, the bravest of his gentlemen, — the whole without advantage to his elevation and with great damage to his fame, — this man, repudiated by fortune, suddenly saw himself overwhelmed with the favors of a powerful queen, inaccessible up to then to any mortal glance, and raised by a whole people to the highest dignity which this people could confer. The inhabitants of Flanders offered him a crown and Elizabeth gave him her ring.

"We do not pretend to be an historian; if occasionally we become one, it is when history chances to descend to the level of romance, or better yet, when romance rises to the height of history; it is then that we plunge our inquisitive glances into the princely existence of the Duc d'Anjou, an existence which, always side by side with the illustrious path of royalty, is full of those events, sometimes sombre, sometimes brilliant, which are usually noticed only in the lives of kings."

We who have read history or *The Forty-Five* know why neither Flanders' crown nor Elizabeth's ring availed him.

History furnishes a parallel to this royal brother in the person of Richard III. of England, who, however, replaced François' pusillanimity by a desperate courage.

The Duc d'Anjou has previously been spoken of as the villain of the Valois romances, in contrast with Henry of Navarre, the hero of them. Apparently the hero plays an insignificant part in the last two books. But it is for him a time of planning and waiting in which he masks his real self behind an indifference that deceives the most astute — and by "the most astute" we mean Chicot the jester.

"Since his stay in Navarre, Henry's character, like the skin of a chameleon, which assumes the color of the object upon which it happens to be, — Henry's character, on touching his native soil had undergone some changes. Henry had known how to put sufficient space between the royal claw and this precious skin which he had saved so skilfully from all rent so as not to fear any further attacks. However, his outward policy was always the same; he extinguished himself in the general uproar, extinguishing with him and around him some illustrious names which in the French world one wondered to see reflecting their brightness on a pale crown of Navarre. . . . In short, he vegetated, happy to live. For the vulgar he was a subject for hyperbolical jesting. For Chicot he was a subject for deep thought."

And yet, right upon the deep thought which the clever jester gave his subject, Chicot is completely out-generalled for the first and only time in his life by this same Henry. How Henry fought Chicot with his own weapons, how frankly Chicot admitted his defeat, and how warmly the two came to appreciate each other form some of the most entertaining chapters in the book.

Chicot himself does not deteriorate in this sequel. He appears again with all the wit, drollery, cleverness, and skill of earlier days. While his friend Gorenflot has become more puffed up with feasting and pride, Chicot retains his lankness of limb and sinew of arm. Although he recognizes the superiority of Henry of Navarre over his royal master, he is unswervingly faithful. "I have but one service to follow in this world, that of my prince," he replies to Navarre's proffered friendship; "let me serve him as long as he lives. Do

not envy him his last servant." Ah, Chicot! never spoke truer heart!

Another continuation noted in this book is the growth of the Holy League, whose power harassed Henry III. to such an extent in *La Dame de Monsoreau.* Its continued plots find check after the King's famous "Forty-Five Guardsmen" are established. Still his reign is a troubled one to the end. And in the midst of it we finally leave him, watching on the one side this menacing power of allied Catholicism under the Guises; on the other side the increasing strength of the Protestant cause under Henry of Navarre; and answering the queen mother's sorrowful murmur by the bedside of the dead D'Anjou with the query, "Who will succeed me?"

J. Walker McSpadden.

CAST OF CHARACTERS.

Aurilly, confidant of the Duc d'Anjou.
Biran, Hector de, of the "Forty-Five."
Bonhomet, Maître Claude, host of the "Corne d'Abundance" inn.
Borroville, Captain, of the League; also known as Borromée.
Bouchage, Henri de Joyeuse, Comte du, confidant of the King.
Brigard, of the League.
Brisson, President of the Council.
Carmainges, Ernauton, Vicomte de, of the "Forty-Five."
Catherine de Médicis, queen mother.
Chalabre, De, of the "Forty-Five."
Chavantrade, Militor de, Gascon.
Chicot, De, King's jester; also known as Robert Briquet.
Chirac, physician to the Queen of Navarre.
Clement, Jacques, Jacobin monk.
Crillon, De, Colonel of the Guards.
Crucé, De, of the League.
D'Anjou, François, Duc, afterwards Duc de Brabant and Count of Flanders; brother of Henri III.
D'Aubiac, page at the Court of Navarre.
D'Épernon, Nogaret de la Valette, Duc, confidant of Henri III.
Eusèbe, Jacobin monk.
Fournichon, Maître, host of "The Sword of the Proud Chevalier" inn.
Fournichon, Dame, wife of foregoing.
Friard, Jean, citizen.
Goes, Flemish sailor.
Gorenflot, Dom Modeste, Jacobin monk.
Grandchamp, valet to the Baron de Méridor.

Guise, Henri de Lorraine, Duc de, of the League.
Henri III., King of France.
Henri de Bourbon, King of Navarre.
Joyeuse, Anne Daigues, Duc de, Grand Admiral of France.
Joyeuse, François, Cardinal de, of the court.
Leclerc, Bussy, of the League.
Le Haudouin, Rémy, physician, friend of Diane de Méridor.
Loignac, De, captain of the "Forty-Five."
Louise de Lorraine, Queen of France.
Marguerite de Valois, Queen of Navarre.
Marteau, Lachappelle, of the League.
Mayenne, Duc de, of the League.
Mayneville, Comte de, of the League.
Miradoux, Eustache de, of the "Forty-Five."
Miradoux, Mme. Lardille de, wife of foregoing.
Miradoux, Militor de, son of foregoing.
Miron, court physician.
Miton, Maître, citizen.
Monsoreau, Mme. Diane de (née Méridor).
Montcrabeau, Pertinax de, of the "Forty-Five."
Montmorency, Mlle. de ("La Fosseuse"), of the court of Navarre.
Montpensier, Duchesse de, of the League.
Mornay, Duplessis de, of the court of Navarre.
Panurge, Jacobin monk.
Pincornay, Perducas de, of the "Forty-Five."
Poulain, Nicolas, of the League.
Saint-Aignan, Comte de, colonel under the Duc d'Anjou.
Sainte-Maline, René de, of the "Forty-Five."
Salcède, De, of the League.
Tanchon, Maître, commander of executions.
Turenne, Vicomte de, of the court of Navarre.
Vesin, De, commanding the Cahors garrison.
William of Nassau, Prince of Orange.

45 Guards.

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THE FORTY-FIVE GUARDSMEN.

CHAPTER I.

THE PORTE SAINT ANTOINE.

Etiam si omnes!

On the 26th of October, in the year 1585, the gates of the Porte Saint Antoine, contrary to all custom, were still closed at half-past ten o'clock in the morning.

At a quarter to eleven, a guard of twenty Swiss, recognizable by their uniform as the Swiss from the small cantons, that is, the best friends of Henry III., then King, passed out of the street of the Mortellerie, and advanced toward the Porte Saint Antoine, which opened, and closed behind them.

Once outside the Porte, they ranged themselves along the hedges which beyond the gate bordered the straggling enclosures on either side of the road. By its mere presence, the guard drove back a goodly number of peasants and citizens coming from Montreuil, from Vincennes, or from Saint Maur, in order to enter the city before noon. This entrance they had been unable to effect, the Porte being closed, as we have stated. If it is true that a crowd, by its very nature, brings disorder with it, it might be supposed that by the sending of the guard the provost wished to anticipate the disturbance which might occur at the Porte Saint Antoine.

The crowd was enormous. People were arriving every moment by the three different roads; monks from the neighboring convents, women seated on the pack-saddles of asses, peasants in their carts, all helped to increase the already dense mass which had been stopped by the unusual closing of the gates, and all, by their questions, more or less pressing, made a low, continual murmur, while an occasional voice, rising above the general medley, ascended even to the pitch of anger or complaint.

Besides the multitude of those who wished to enter the city, there might have been observed some special groups who seemed to have come out from it. These, instead of gazing through the interstices of the gates at Paris, fixed their eyes on the horizon, bounded by the convent of the Jacobins, the priory of Vincennes, and the Croix Faubin, as if by one of these three routes, which formed a kind of fan, they were expecting the advent of some Messiah.

These latter groups were not unlike the tranquil islands in the middle of the Seine, around which the water, eddying and playing, detaches now a bit of sod, now some ancient willow twig, which, after hesitating for some time at the ripples, finally hurries away with the current.

These groups, to which we return with insistence, because they deserve our entire attention, consisted chiefly of bourgeois from Paris, closely wrapped in hose and doublet. We omitted to state that the weather was cold, the north wind piercing, and great low-hanging clouds seemed anxious to snatch from the trees the last yellow leaves, which hung sadly from them.

Three of these bourgeois were talking together; that is, two talked while the third listened; or, rather, let us express ourselves more clearly and say that the third did not seem even to listen, so intent was he in looking toward Vincennes. Let us first turn our attention to him. He was a man who must have been tall when he stood erect; but at this moment his long legs, with which he seemed at a loss to know what to do, when they were not in active use, were bent under him, and his arms, no less long in proportion, were folded on his doublet. He was leaning against the hedge, propped up by its pliant bushes; and with a determination which resembled the prudence of a man desirous of not being recognized, he kept his face hidden behind his hand, showing only one eye, whose piercing glance shot between his middle and ring fingers, separated to the distance that was just absolutely necessary to allow the passage of the visual ray. By the side of this strange personage a little man mounted on a hillock was talking to a large man, who was continually slipping off the hillock, and at every fall catching at the buttons of his interlocutor's doublet.

These were the other two bourgeois, who, together with the one who was seated, formed the mystic number three which we stated in a preceding paragraph.

"Yes, Maître Miton," said the little man to the large one; "yes, I tell you, and I repeat it, there will be a hundred thousand people around the scaffold of Salcède — a hundred thousand at least, without counting those who are already on the Place de Grève, or who are going thither from the various quarters of Paris. See how many are here, and this is only one gate! Judge, therefore, since by actual count there are sixteen gates!"

"A hundred thousand! that is a large number, Friard," answered the large man; "a great many, you may be sure, will follow my example, and will not go to see this unfortunate Salcède quartered, for fear of an uproar, and they will be right!"

"Maître Miton, Maître Miton, take care," said the little man. "You are talking like a politician. There will be no trouble at all, I am sure."

Then seeing his friend shake his head doubtfully, "Is it not so, monsieur," he went on, turning to the man with the long arms and legs, who, instead of continuing to stare towards Vincennes, had turned round, and without taking his hand from before his face, had selected the Porte as the object of his gaze.

"Pardon?" said the latter, as though he had heard only the question, and not the previous words which had been addressed to the second bourgeois.

"I say that there will be nothing on the Grève to-day."

"I think you are mistaken and that there will be the execution of Salcède," quietly replied the long-armed man.

"Yes, no doubt; but I say that there will be no noise about it."

"There will be the noise of the blows of the whip, which they will give to the horses."

"You do not understand me. By noise, I mean tumult. I say that there will be no tumult on the Grève. If there were likely to be a tumult, the King would not have had a stand decorated at the Hôtel de Ville, so that he himself, the two queens, and a part of the court could be present at the execution."

"Do kings ever know when there will be a tumult there?" said the man with the long arms and legs, shrugging his shoulders with an air of supreme pity.

"Oh! Oh!" said Maître Miton, leaning towards the ear of his friend; "this man speaks in a strange way. Do you know him?"

"No," replied the little man.

"Then why do you speak to him?"

"In order to talk to him."

"You are wrong. You can see readily enough that he is not naturally talkative."

"Yet it seems to me," replied Friard, loud enough to be heard by the man with the long arms, "that one of the great pleasures in life is to exchange thoughts."

"With those whom one knows, yes," replied Maître Miton, "but not with those with whom one is unacquainted."

"Are not all men brothers, as the priest of Saint Leu says?" added Friard, persuasively.

"Originally, yes; but in times like ours relationship is singularly relaxed, Friard. So talk with me, if you must talk, and leave this stranger to himself."

"I have been acquainted with you, as you say, for a long time, and I know beforehand what you will answer; while on the other hand, this stranger might perhaps have something new to say to me."

"Hush! he is listening."

"So much the better. If he listens, perhaps he will answer me. So, monsieur," continued Friard, turning to the stranger, "you think there will be some trouble on the Grève?"

"I? I said nothing of the kind."

"I do not claim that you said so," went on Friard, in a tone which he strove to render subtle. "I claim that you think so, that is all."

"And on what do you base your supposition? Are you a sorcerer, Monsieur Friard?"

"Why, he knows me!" exclaimed the bourgeois in great surprise. "How does he know me?"

"Have I not called you by name two or three times, my friend?" said Miton, shrugging his shoulders in the manner of a man who is ashamed of the limited intelligence of his questioner.

"Ah! true," replied Friard, making an effort to understand, and, thanks to the effort, succeeding. "It is certainly so. Well, since he knows me, he will answer me. Now, monsieur," he continued, turning to the stranger, "I believe you think there will be some noise on the Grève, for if you did not think so, you would be there, whereas, on the contrary, you are here. . . . Ah!"

This "Ah!" proved that in this deduction Friard had reached the furthest limits of his logic and his intelligence.

"But you, monsieur Friard, since you think contrary to what you think I think," replied the stranger, emphasizing the words already uttered by the other, and repeated by himself, "why are you not on the Grève? It seems to me that the spectacle is pleasing enough for the friends of the King to flock thither. As to that, perhaps you will tell me that you are not of the friends of the King, but of those of Monsieur de Guise, and that you are waiting here for the Lorraines, who, they say, are about to enter Paris, in order to deliver Monsieur de Salcède."

"No, monsieur," hastily replied the little man, visibly frightened at the stranger's suggestion. "No, monsieur, I am waiting for my wife, Nicole Friard, who has gone to take twenty-four tablecloths to the priory of the Jacobins, having the honor to be special washerwoman to Dom Modeste Gorenflot, abbé of the aforesaid priory of the Jacobins. But to return to what you said concerning the tumult of which my friend Miton was speaking, and in which I put no more faith than you do, at least."

"Comrade, comrade," cried Miton, "see what is going on!"

Maître Friard followed the direction indicated by his companion's finger, and saw that besides the gates the closing of which had already been such a cause of excitement, they were closing still another gate.

This done, a party of Swiss stationed themselves in front of the ditch.

"What!" cried Friard, turning pale, "were there not enough barriers, that they must now close another gate?"

"Well, what did I tell you?" replied Miton, growing pale in turn.

"It is queer, is it not?" said the stranger, smiling.

And in smiling he showed between his mustache and beard a double row of white, pointed teeth, which seemed wonderfully sharpened from their owner's habit of using them at least four times a day.

At sight of this new precaution, a long murmur of surprise and some cries of consternation rose from the dense crowd that filled the approaches to the gate.

"Clear the road!" cried the imperative voice of an officer.

This manœuvre was executed instantly, but not without

difficulty; those on horseback and in wagons, forced back, crushed some feet here and there, and broke the ribs of some among the crowd; women screamed, men swore, those who could do so fled, tumbling one over the other.

"The Lorraines! The Lorraines!" shouted a voice in the midst of all the tumult.

The most terrible cry taken from the pale vocabulary of fright could not have produced a more instantaneous or a more decisive result than this —

"The Lorraines!"

"So you see? You see?" cried Miton, trembling. "The Lorraines! The Lorraines! Let us flee!"

"Flee? and whither?" asked Friard.

"Into this enclosure," cried Miton, tearing his hands as he grasped the thorns of the hedge against which the stranger was carelessly leaning.

"Into this enclosure?" said Friard. "That is easier said than done, Maître Miton. I see no opening by which we can enter, and you do not propose to climb the hedge, which is higher than I am."

"I shall try," said Miton. "I shall try."

And he resumed his efforts.

"Ah, take care, my good woman!" cried Friard, in the agonizing tone of a man who is beginning to lose control of himself. "Your ass is stepping on my heels. Oh! monsieur, look out! your horse is going to kick. Heavens, my friend! you are ramming the shafts of your wagon into my ribs."

While Maître Miton was grasping the branches of the hedge in order to climb over it, and his friend Friard was vainly seeking an opening through which he could creep, the stranger rose, and by merely stretching his long legs, with a movement as simple as that by which a horseman places himself in his saddle, he strode over the hedge without a single branch touching his hose.

Maître Miton followed his example, but tore his hose in three places. It went otherwise with Friard, who, unable either to climb over or creep through, and more and more in danger of being crushed by the crowd, uttered heart-rending cries, whereat the stranger extended his long arm, caught him by the ruff and the collar of his doublet, and raising him, lifted him to the other side of the hedge, as easily as he would have lifted a child.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" cried Maître Miton, rejoiced at the sight, and letting his eyes follow the ascent and descent of his friend Friard, "you look like the sign of the great Absalom."

"Oh!" cried Friard, as he touched the ground, "I may look like whatever you please, now that, thanks to monsieur, I am on this side of the hedge."

Then straightening himself in order to look at the stranger, to whose breast he scarcely reached:

"Ah! monsieur," he continued, "what a graceful act! Monsieur, you are a veritable Hercules, on my word of honor, the honor of Jean Friard! Your name, monsieur, the name of my deliverer, the name of my friend?"

And the brave fellow uttered the last word in the effusion of a heart profoundly grateful.

"I am called Briquet, monsieur," replied the stranger, "Robert Briquet, at your service."

"And you have already served me considerably, Monsieur Robert Briquet, I venture to say. Oh! my wife will bless you. But, by the way, my poor wife! Oh! my God, my God! She will be suffocated in this crowd. Ah! cursed Swiss, fit only to crush people!"

Scarcely had Friard finished speaking when he felt on his shoulder a hand as heavy as that of a stone statue.

He turned in order to see who it was that was taking such liberty with him. The hand was that of a Swiss.

"Do you want dem do kill you, my leetle freund?" asked the robust soldier.

"Ah! we are surrounded!" cried Friard.

"Let each one save himself as best he can," added Miton; and both, thanks to the fact that the hedge had been scaled, having no obstacle before them, gained the open, followed by the mocking eyes and the quiet laugh of the man with the long arms and legs.

When they were out of sight, the latter approached the Swiss, who had just been stationed there on guard.

"Your hand, apparently, is of use, my friend," said he.

"Faith! monsieur, not pad, not pad."

"So much the better, for it is an important thing, especially if, as they say, the Lorraines are coming."

"Dey vill not come!"

"No?"

"Not at all."

"How happens it, then, that this gate is closed? I do not understand."

"No neet to understant," replied the Swiss, laughing loudly at his own wit.

"That 's true, comrade, very true; thanks."

And Robert Briquet left the Swiss to join another group, while the worthy Helvetian stopped laughing and muttered:

"Mein Gott! Ich glaube er soottet meiner. Was ist das für ein Mann der sich erlaubt einen Schweizer seiner kœniglichen Majestæt auszulachen," which translated meant:

"My God! I believe he is laughing at me. Who is this man who dares to make fun of a Swiss belonging to his Majesty?"

CHAPTER II.

WHAT TOOK PLACE OUTSIDE THE PORTE SAINT ANTOINE.

One of the groups consisted of a considerable number of citizens, who had been surprised outside of the city by the unexpected closing of the gates. These citizens surrounded four or five cavaliers of martial bearing, whom the closing of the gates greatly annoyed, apparently, for they cried out with all their might:

"The gate! The gate!"

The shouts, violently taken up by every one, caused for the moment an infernal clatter.

Robert Briquet advanced toward the group, and began to shout louder than any of them: "The gate! The gate!" As a result, one of the cavaliers, charmed with the strong voice, turned to him, bowed, and said:

"Is it not shameful, monsieur, that they close the gate of the city in broad daylight, as though the Spanish or the English were besieging Paris?"

Robert Briquet looked attentively at the speaker, a man of forty or forty-five years of age. He seemed, moreover, to be the leader among the three or four who surrounded him.

The examination doubtless inspired Robert Briquet with confidence, for he immediately bowed in turn, and answered:

"Ah, monsieur, you are right, ten times right, twenty times right; but," he added, "without being too inquisitive, may I

venture to ask what you think is the motive for such an action ? "

"*Pardieu !*" said a bystander ; "the fear they have lest some one shall eat their Salcède."

"*Cap de Bious !*" exclaimed a voice, — "sorry food !"

Robert Briquet turned in the direction of the voice, the accent of which was strongly Gascon, and saw a young man of twenty or twenty-five, resting his hand on the crupper of the horse belonging to the man who had seemed to him to be the leader.

The young man was bareheaded ; no doubt he had lost his hat in the confusion.

Maître Briquet appeared to be an observer ; but, as a rule, his observations were rapid, hence he quickly withdrew his eyes from the Gascon, who no doubt seemed to him of no importance, and returned to the cavalier.

"But," said he, "since it is said that this Salcède belongs to Monsieur de Guise, it is not such a poor ragoût."

"Bah ! they say that ?" asked the curious Gascon, opening his great ears.

"Yes, no doubt they say that," replied the cavalier, shrugging his shoulders, "but in these times they say many silly things."

"Ah !" hazarded Briquet, with his quizzical glance and his mocking smile, "so you believe, monsieur, that Salcède does not belong to Monsieur de Guise ? "

"I not only do not believe it, I am sure of it," replied the cavalier.

Then, as he saw that Robert Briquet in drawing nearer made a gesture as though to say : "Ah ! bah ! and on what do you base your conviction ? " he continued :

"Assuredly not ; if Salcède had belonged to the duke, the latter would not have let him be captured, or at least would not have allowed him to be carried from Brussels to Paris, bound hand and foot, without at least making an attempt to rescue him."

"An attempt at rescue," said Briquet, "would have been very dangerous, for, whether it succeeded or not, the instant that it came from Monsieur de Guise, Monsieur de Guise would have been admitting that he had conspired against the Duke of Anjou."

"Monsieur de Guise," dryly replied the cavalier, "would

not have been withheld by any such consideration, I am sure, and from the moment that he neither reclaimed nor defended Salcède, Salcède no longer belonged to him."

"Yet, pardon me if I insist," continued Briquet, "but it is not I who invent; it seems that Salcède has spoken."

"Where? Before the judges?"

"No, not before the judges, monsieur; to the torture.

"Is it not the same thing?" asked Maître Robert Briquet; in a manner that he vainly strove to render unaffected.

"No, certainly it is not the same thing, — far from it. Moreover, they claim that he has spoken, but they do not repeat what he said."

"Excuse me again, monsieur," went on Robert Briquet; "they do repeat it, and at great length, too."

"And what did he say?" demanded the cavalier, impatiently. "Speak, since you are so well informed."

"I do not boast of being well informed, monsieur, since, on the contrary, I am trying to gain information from you," replied Briquet.

"Come, let us understand each other!" exclaimed the cavalier, impatiently. "You stated that they repeated the words of Salcède. What were they? Speak."

"I cannot say that they were his own words, monsieur," said Robert Briquet, who seemed to take pleasure in irritating the cavalier.

"Well, then, what are those they attribute to him?"

"They say that he has confessed that he conspired for Monsieur de Guise."

"Against the King of France, no doubt? Always the same story!"

"Not against his Majesty the King of France, but against his Highness Monseigneur le Duc d'Anjou."

"If he confessed that" —

"Well," said Robert Briquet.

"Well, he is a villain!" exclaimed the cavalier, frowning.

"Yes," said Robert Briquet in a low tone; "but if he did what he has confessed, he is a brave man!"

"Ah! monsieur, the boot, the gibbet, and the boiler make honest men confess many things."

"Alas! you state a great truth, monsieur," said the cavalier, becoming more calm, as he heaved a sigh.

"Bah!" interrupted the Gascon, who by bending his head

in the direction of each speaker had heard everything. "Bah! boot, gibbet, boiler, — fine torture that! If this Salcède has spoken, he is a knave, and his patron is another."

"Oh, oh," said the cavalier, unable to repress a start of impatience, "you are speaking in a very loud tone, Monsieur Gascon."

"I?"

"Yes, you."

"I speak in the tone which pleases me, *Cap de Bious!* So much the worse for those whom my words do not please."

The cavalier made a gesture of anger.

"Softly!" said a gentle and at the same time imperative voice, the owner of which Robert Briquet sought in vain.

The cavalier seemed to make an effort, but had not the strength to regain complete control of himself.

"Do you know those of whom you speak, monsieur," he asked the Gascon.

"Do I know Salcède?"

"Yes."

"Not in the least."

"And the Duc de Guise?"

"No."

"And the Duc d'Alençon?"

"Still less."

"Do you know that Monsieur Salcède is a brave man?"

"So much the better; he will die bravely."

"And that when Monsieur de Guise wishes to conspire he will conspire himself?"

"*Cap de Bious!* what is that to me?"

"And that the Duc d'Anjou, formerly Monsieur d'Alençon, has killed or allowed to be killed whoever was interested in him — La Mole, Coconas, Bussy, and the rest?"

"What do I care for that?"

"What! you do not care?"

"Mayneville! Mayneville!" murmured the same voice.

"Certainly, it is nothing to me. I know only one thing, *sangdieu*, I have business in Paris this very day, this morning, and because of this madman Salcède they close the gates in my face. *Cap de Bious!* this Salcède is a scoundrel, and so are all those who, with him, are the cause of these gates being closed instead of opened."

"Oh! Oh! what a fierce Gascon," murmured Robert Briquet, "no doubt we shall see something interesting."

But this interesting something for which the bourgeois was waiting did not happen. The last remarks had caused the blood to rush to the face of the cavalier, but he lowered his head, became silent, and swallowed his anger.

"As a matter of fact," said he, "you are right — a plague on all those who keep us from entering Paris!"

"Oh! Oh!" said Robert Briquet to himself, who had lost neither the changes on the face of the cavalier nor the two calls made on his patience; "ah! ah! it seems that I am to see something more interesting than I expected."

As he reflected thus, there came the sound of a trumpet, and almost at the same instant the Swiss broke through the crowd with their halberds, as though they were cutting into a great pie of birds, and separated the groups into two compact masses, which lined up along either side of the road, leaving the middle clear. Through this cleared space the officer of whom we have spoken, and into whose keeping the gate seemed entrusted, passed up and down on his horse; then after a moment's survey, which resembled a challenge, he ordered the trumpets to sound. This was done instantly, and caused a silence throughout the masses which one would have believed impossible after so much agitation and confusion.

Then the crier, in a flowered tunic, bearing on his breast a scutcheon on which shone the arms of Paris, advanced, a paper in his hand, and read in the nasal voice peculiar to criers:

"Let it be known to our good people of Paris, and the environs, that the gates will be closed from now until one o'clock in the afternoon, and that no one can enter the city before that hour; and this by the will of the King and by order of Monsieur the Provost of Paris."

The crier stopped to take breath. At once the crowd took advantage of the pause to manifest their astonishment and discontent by a long hoot, which the crier, justice is due to him, bore without moving a muscle.

The officer raised his hand imperatively, and at once silence returned.

The crier continued without difficulty or hesitation, as though habit had hardened him against these outbursts of which he had just been the target.

"Those are exempt from this who shall present themselves

as bearers of a sign of recognition or who shall be duly summoned by letter or mandate.

"Given at the Hôtel of the Provostship of Paris, by the express order of his Majesty, the 26th of October in the year of grace 1585.

"Trumpets, sound!"

The trumpets at once gave forth their hoarse barkings.

Scarcely had the crier ceased speaking when behind the line of Swiss and soldiers the crowd began to undulate, swelling and twisting like a serpent.

"What does that mean?" asked the more peaceful ones. "No doubt some plot."

"Oh! it is probably to keep us from entering Paris that the matter has been so arranged," said the cavalier who had borne with such singular patience the rebuffs of the Gascon, in a low tone to his companions; "these Swiss, this crier, these bolts, these trumpets are for us. On my soul, I am proud of them!"

"Room! Room, you others!" cried the officer in command of troops. "A thousand devils! You see well enough that you prevent those from passing who have a right to enter the gates."

"*Cap de Bious!* I know one who will pass, though all the bourgeois on earth were between him and the gate," and the Gascon who by his sharp replies had won the admiration of Maître Robert Briquet elbowed his way through the crowd.

In an instant he reached the open space which, thanks to the Swiss, had been made between the two masses of spectators.

One may imagine that all eyes were turned with alacrity and interest towards the man favored sufficiently to enter when he had been ordered to remain outside.

But the Gascon paid little heed to all the envious glances. He took his stand proudly, making every muscle of his body stand out under his thin green doublet. The muscles seemed like so many cords pulled by an inner crank. His dry, bony wrists extended three good inches below his shabby sleeves. He had a clear glance, yellow hair, which curled either naturally or by chance, for the dust had been creeping into its color for a good ten years. His large supple feet were supported by nervous, dry legs like those of a buck. Over one of his hands he had drawn a glove of embroidered kid which was greatly surprised to see itself destined to protect the other skin rougher than itself; in his other hand he flipped a

hazel twig. For a moment he glanced around him; then, thinking that the officer to whom reference has been made was the most important person of the troop, he walked straight to him.

The latter looked at him for some moments without speaking.

The Gascon, not the least disconcerted, returned his glance.

"You have lost your hat, it appears," said the officer.

"Yes, monsieur."

"In the crowd?"

"No. I had just received a letter from my mistress; I was reading it, *Cap de Bious*, near the river, a quarter of a mile from here, when suddenly a gust of wind carried away letter and hat. I ran after the letter, although the button of my hat was a single diamond. I recovered my letter; but when I returned to the hat, the wind had carried it into the river, and the river into Paris! . . . it will make the fortune of some poor devil; so much the better!"

"So that you go bareheaded?"

"Can one not find a hat in Paris? *Cap de Bious!* I will buy a more magnificent one, and I will put on it a diamond twice as large as the first."

The officer gave an imperceptible shrug of the shoulders, but slight as it was the movement, it did not escape the Gascon.

"Beg pardon?" said he.

"Have you a card?" demanded the officer.

"Certainly, I have one, or rather two."

"One will suffice if it is the right one."

"But I am not mistaken," continued the Gascon, opening his great eyes. "Why, no, *Cap de Bious!* I am not mistaken; I have the honor of addressing Monsieur de Loignac?"

"It is possible, monsieur," replied the officer, coldly, apparently little pleased by the recognition.

"Monsieur de Loignac, my fellow-countryman?"

"I do not deny it."

"My cousin!"

"That 's good! Your card!"

"Here it is."

The Gascon drew from his glove the half of a card skilfully cut.

"Follow me," said De Loignac, without looking at it, "you

and your companions, if you have any. We will verify the admissions."

And he took his stand near the gate.

The Gascon with the bare head followed. Five others followed with bare heads.

The first was adorned with a splendid cuirass, so marvellously wrought that it might have come from the hands of Benvenuto Cellini. However, as the pattern was somewhat old-fashioned, its magnificence occasioned more laughter than admiration.

It is true that no other detail of the costume of the man who wore the cuirass equalled the almost royal splendor of the prospectus.

The second man who clamped along was followed by a big gray-haired lackey, and thin and tanned as he was, he looked like the precursor of Don Quixote, as his servant might have passed for that of Sancho Panza.

The third appeared carrying in his arms a child of ten months. He was followed by a woman who kept tight hold of his leather belt, while two other children, one four, the other five years of age, clung to her dress.

The fourth limped, and was attached to a long sword. Finally the procession came to an end with a handsome young man, mounted on a black horse which was covered with dust, though evidently a thoroughbred. By the side of the others this man looked like a king.

Forced to advance slowly so as not to leave his comrades behind, perhaps, also, inwardly pleased at not being too close to them, the young man paused an instant at the edge of the line formed by the people. Just then he felt a pull at the scabbard of his sword, and he turned round.

The one who had thus attracted his attention was a slight, graceful young man, with black hair and shining eyes. On his hands he wore gloves.

"What can I do for you, monsieur?" said the cavalier.

"A favor, monsieur."

"Speak, but speak quickly, I beg; you see that they are waiting for me."

"I must enter the city, monsieur — an imperative necessity — you understand? As for you, you are alone, and need a page to do credit to your fine appearance."

"Well?"

"Well; consent! consent! Take me in; I will be your page."

"Thank you," said the cavalier; "but I do not wish to be served by any one."

"Not even by me?" asked the young man with such a strange smile that the cavalier felt the icy reserve in which he had tried to encase his heart beginning to melt away.

"I meant to say that I was not able to be served."

"Yes, I know that you are not rich, Monsieur Ernauton de Carmainges," said the young page.

The cavalier started; but without paying attention to that, the boy went on:

"So do not let us speak of wages; and it will be you, on the contrary, if you grant me what I ask, who shall be paid a hundredfold for the services you render me. Let me serve you, I beg, and remember that he who now begs has sometimes commanded."

The young man pressed Ernauton's hand with too much familiarity for a page; then turning to the group of cavaliers whom we already know, he said: "I shall pass in; this is the most important thing. But you, Mayneville, try to do as much by some means or other."

"Your passing in is not everything," replied that gentleman; "it is necessary that he should see you."

"Oh, make yourself easy. As soon as I am through this gate, he shall see me."

"Do not forget the sign agreed on."

"Two fingers on the lips, is it not?"

"Yes. God help you!"

"Well, master page," said the man on the black horse; "have we made up our mind?"

"Here I am, master," replied the young man; and he sprang lightly to the saddle behind his companion, who rejoined the five other fortunate ones occupied in showing their cards, thus proving their right to enter.

"*Ventre de biche!*" exclaimed Robert Briquet, as he followed them with his eyes. "That is a whole company of Gascons, or the devil take me!"

CHAPTER III.

THE EXAMINATION.

THE necessary examination of the six privileged ones whom we have seen issue from the ranks of the populace in order to enter the gates was neither very long nor very complicated.

It consisted in taking from the pocket the half card and handing it to the officer, who compared it with another half, and if the two halves fitted together and made one, the rights of the bearer of the card were assured.

The Gascon with the bare head advanced first; the examination began with him.

"Your name?" said the officer.

"My name, monsieur? It is written on that card, on which you will find something else besides."

"Never mind! Your name," repeated the officer, impatiently. "Don't you know your name?"

"Indeed, I know it, *Cap de Bious!* and I might have forgotten it in order that you might tell it to me, since we are fellow-countrymen, and even cousins."

"Your name? A thousand devils! Do you suppose I have time to waste in reminiscences?"

"Well, I am Perducas de Pincornay."

"Perducas de Pincornay?" said Monsieur de Loignac, whom henceforth we shall call by the name which his fellow-countryman gave him.

Then glancing at the card:

"Perducas de Pincornay, October 26, 1585, at noon precisely."

"Porte Saint Antoine," added the Gascon, pointing to the card with his brown, thin finger.

"Very good! it's all right; enter," said Monsieur de Loignac, in order to cut short all further conversation between him and his countrymen. "You next," said he to the second applicant.

The man with the cuirass advanced.

"Your card!" demanded De Loignac.

"Well, Monsieur de Loignac," cried this one, "do you not recognize the son of one of the friends of your childhood, whom you have dandled twenty times on your knees?"

"No."

"Pertinax de Montcrabeau;" said the young man in astonishment, "do you not recognize me?"

"When I am on duty I recognize no one, monsieur. Your card!" The young man with the cuirass held out his card.

"Pertinax de Montcrabeau, October 25, at noon precisely. Porte Saint Antoine. Pass on."

The young man moved forward, and somewhat surprised by his reception, rejoined Perducas, who was waiting at the entrance of the Porte.

The third Gascon approached. It was the one with the wife and children.

"Your card!" demanded De Loignac. His obedient hand plunged at once into a small satchel of goatskin which he wore at his right side.

But in vain. Embarrassed by the child which he carried in his arms, he could not find the paper asked for.

"What the devil are you doing with that child, monsieur? You see well enough that he is a bother to you."

"He is my son, Monsieur de Loignac."

"Well! Put your son down on the ground." The Gascon obeyed. The child began to howl.

"So you are married, then?" asked De Loignac.

"Yes, monsieur."

"At twenty?"

"We marry young with us; you know that very well, Monsieur de Loignac. You yourself were married at eighteen."

"Ah!" said De Loignac, "here is another who knows me!"

Meanwhile the woman had approached, followed by the children clinging to her skirt.

"And why should he not be married?" she cried, drawing herself up, and pushing back from her thin forehead the black hair, which the dust of the road had matted down like dough. "Is it out of fashion to marry in Paris? Yes, monsieur, he is married, and here are two other children who call him father."

"Yes, but they are the sons of my wife, Monsieur de Loignac, as is also that big fellow yonder. Come here, Militor, and salute Monsieur de Loignac, our fellow-countryman."

A lad of sixteen or eighteen, his hands in his buff leather belt, came forward, vigorous, agile, resembling a falcon with his round eye and hooked nose.

He wore a loose knitted woollen jacket, and his muscular

limbs were clothed in chamois-skin breeches. A budding mustache shaded his lip, at once insolent and sensual.

"This is Militor, my step-son, Monsieur de Loignac, the eldest son of my wife, who is a Chavantrade, a relative of the De Loignacs. Militor de Chavantrade at your service. Salute, Militor."

Then stooping over the child, who was rolling and crying in the road:

"Be quiet, Scipio; be quiet, little one," he added, searching all his pockets for the card.

In the meantime, Militor, in obedience to his father's injunction, was bowing stiffly, without taking his hands from his belt.

"For the love of Heaven, monsieur, your card!" cried De Loignac, impatiently.

"Lardille, come and help me," cried the blushing Gascon to his wife.

Lardille freed herself from the clinging hands, and searched the satchel and the pockets of her husband.

"Well!" she exclaimed, "we must have lost it."

"In that case, I shall have you arrested," said De Loignac.

The Gascon turned pale.

"I am Eustache de Miradoux," said he, "and I recommend myself to my kinsman, Monsieur de Sainte Maline."

"Ah, you are kinsman of Sainte Maline?" said De Loignac, somewhat mollified. "It is true that if one pay attention to them, they are related to everybody! Well, search again, and to some purpose."

"Lardille, look among the children's clothes," said Eustache, trembling with vexation and anxiety.

Lardille knelt down before a modest bundle of clothes, and turned them over and over, muttering to herself.

The young Scipio continued to scream, while his step-brothers, seeing that no attention was paid to them, amused themselves by pouring sand into his mouth.

Militor did not move. One would have said that the troubles of family life passed over or under this great fellow without touching him.

"Why!" exclaimed Monsieur de Loignac, suddenly; "what do I see yonder in a leather wrapper, on the sleeve of that booby?"

"Oh, oh! that's it!" cried Eustache, in triumph; "that

was Lardille's idea, I remember now; she sewed the envelope on Militor."

"That he might carry something," said De Loignac, ironically. "Fie, the great calf! He does not even hold up his arms for fear of carrying them."

Militor's lips turned white with anger, while the blood rushed over his nose, chin, and eyebrows.

"A calf has no arms," he muttered, with flashing eyes: "he has hoofs, like some animals of my acquaintance."

"Silence!" said Eustache; "you know very well, Militor, that Monsieur de Loignac does us the honor to jest with us."

"No, by Heaven! I am not jesting," replied De Loignac. "On the contrary, I want this great stupid to take my words as I meant them. If he were my step-son, I would make him carry mother, brother, bundle, and by Heaven! I would mount on top of the whole pile, just to pull his ears, and prove to him that he is nothing but an ass."

Militor was greatly embarrassed; Eustache seemed anxious, but beneath his anxiety there lurked an indescribable pleasure at the insult given to his step-son.

Lardille, in order to end the discussion and save her first-born from the irony of Monsieur de Loignac, handed the officer the card which she had taken out of the leather wrapper.

Monsieur de Loignac took it and read: "Eustache de Miradoux, October 26, noon precisely, Porte Saint Antoine."

"Pass on," said he, "and see that you forget none of your brats, ugly or handsome."

Eustache de Miradoux raised the small Scipio to his arms, Lardille again caught hold of his belt, the two children seized their mother's dress, and this family bunch, followed by the silent Militor, ranged themselves near those who were waiting after their examination was over.

"The deuce!" muttered De Loignac between his teeth, watching Eustache de Miradoux and his family move off. "The plague of soldiers Monsieur d'Épernon will have in them." Then he turned back. "Well," said he, addressing the fourth applicant.

The latter was alone and very stiff, and kept flipping his iron-gray doublet with his thumb and middle finger, in order to brush off the dust. His mustache seemed made of cat's hair, and his green shining eyes and his eyebrows, the arch of which formed a semi circle that stood out above two prominent

cheek-bones, and his thin lips, gave to his physiognomy that look of mistrust and parsimonious reserve which one recognizes in a man who hides the depths of his purse as well as the depths of his heart.

"Chalabre, October 26, at noon precisely, Porte Saint Antoine. That's all right. Pass on," said De Loignac.

"The expenses of the journey are allowed me, I presume?" observed the Gascon, quietly.

"I am not treasurer, monsieur," replied De Loignac, coldly. "I am merely gate keeper; move on."

Chalabre did so.

Behind him came a blonde young cavalier, who in pulling out his card let fall from his pocket a die and several spot cards.

He said that his name was Saint Capautel, and this statement being confirmed by his card, which was found to be correct, he followed Chalabre.

There remained the sixth, who, at the suggestion of the improvised page, had dismounted from his horse and handed Monsieur de Loignac a card on which was written:

"Ernauton de Carmainges, October 26, at noon precisely, Porte Saint Antoine."

While Monsieur de Loignac was engaged in reading this the page slipped down and tried to keep his face concealed by adjusting the curb of his pretended master's horse, already in perfect order.

"This is your page, monsieur?" asked De Loignac of Ernauton, pointing with his finger to the young man.

"You see, monsieur," said Ernauton, who wished neither to lie nor to betray, "you see that he is attending to my horse's bridle."

"Pass on," said Monsieur de Loignac, gazing attentively at Monsieur de Carmainges, whose face and bearing seemed to please him better than those of all the others. "He is a passable one, at least," he muttered.

Ernauton again mounted; the page, without pretence and without delay, had gone ahead, and was already mingling with those who had preceded him.

"Open the gate," said De Loignac, "and let these six persons and their followers enter."

"Quick, quick, my master," said the page, "let us into the saddle, and be off!"

Again Ernauton yielded to the power which this strange being exercised over him, and, the gate being opened, he spurred his horse, and, guided by the words of the page, plunged into the heart of the Faubourg Saint Antoine.

De Loignac ordered the gate closed behind the six privileged applicants, to the intense discontent of the crowd, who, the formalities over, had thought that they might pass in, in turn, and who, now that this hope was blasted, loudly proclaimed their disapprobation.

Maître Miton, who, after a free run across country, had by degrees regained courage, and who by sounding the ground at every step had finally returned to the place from which he had started, now ventured some complaints as to the arbitrary way in which the soldiery stopped all communication with Paris.

Friard, who had succeeded in finding his wife, and who, protected by her, seemed to fear nothing, related to his better half the news of the day, embellished by comments of his own.

Finally the cavaliers, one of whom had been addressed as Mayneville by the little page, held a consultation as to whether they could not move the stones of the city wall, with the reasonable hope of finding some breach in it, through which they could enter Paris, without need of further waiting at the Porte Saint Antoine or at any other porte.

Robert Briquet, like a thinking philosopher, and a scholar who extracts the pith, had perceived that the *dénoument* of the scene which we have just described would take place near the Porte, and that the conversation of the various cavaliers, the bourgeois, and the peasants would tell him nothing more.

Therefore he approached as near as possible to a small booth which served as porter's lodge, and which was lighted by two windows, the one looking toward Paris, the other into the country.

Scarcely had he taken up his new position when a man, coming from Paris at full gallop, leaped from his horse, and, entering the lodge, appeared at the window.

"Ah, ah!" said De Loignac.

"Here I am, Monsieur de Loignac," said the man.

"Good! whence do you come?"

"From the Porte Saint Victor."

"Your number?"

"Five."

"The cards?"

"Are here."

De Loignac took the cards, examined them, and wrote the number five on a slate which seemed intended for that purpose. The messenger departed.

Scarcely five minutes elapsed before two other messengers arrived. De Loignac questioned each in turn, and always through the grating.

One came from the Porte Bourdelle, and brought the number four; the other from the Porte du Temple, and announced the number six. De Loignac carefully wrote the numbers on the slate.

These messengers went away like the first ones, and were replaced in turn by four others, who arrived as follows:

The first from the Porte Saint Denis, with the number five; the second from the Porte Saint Jacques, with the number three; the third from the Porte Saint Honoré, with the number eight; the fourth from the Porte Montmartre, with the number four. Finally came one from the Porte Bussy, bringing the number four. De Loignac wrote them all down with care, and below them the portes and the number, as follows:

Porte Saint Victor	5
" Bourdelle	4
" du Temple	6
" Saint Denis	5
" Saint Jacques	3
" Saint Honoré	8
" Montmartre	4
" Bussy	4
Lastly, Porte Saint Antoine	6
Total	45

"That is well. Now," cried De Loignac, in a loud voice, "open the gates, and let all who wish to do so, enter."

The gates were thrown open.

At once horses, mules, women, children, and wagons rushed into Paris, at the risk of being suffocated between the two piers of the drawbridge.

In a quarter of an hour the whole tide, which since morning

had been held back by the momentary dyke, had poured into the city through that vast artery called the Rue Saint Antoine.

By degrees the noise subsided. Monsieur de Loignac remounted his horse with the rest. Robert Briquet, the last, as he had been the first, phlegmatically strode over the chain of the bridge, saying:

"All these people wanted to see something, and they have seen nothing, even of their own affairs; I wanted to see nothing, and I alone have seen something. It is interesting, too; I will keep on; but to what good? *Pardieu!* I know enough of it. Will it be any great advantage to me to see Monsieur de Salcède torn into four parts? No, *pardieu!* Besides, I have given up politics. I will go and dine; the sun would point to noon, if there were any sun; it is time."

So saying, he entered Paris with his quiet, ironical smile.

CHAPTER IV.

THE STAND OF HIS MAJESTY KING HENRY III. ON THE GRÈVE.

If we were now to follow as far as the Place de Grève, where it ends this populous thoroughfare of the quarter Saint Antoine, we should find many of our acquaintances in the crowd; but while all these poor citizens, less wise than Robert Briquet, are going thither, pushing, elbowing, and fighting one behind another, we prefer, thanks to the privilege which our historian's wings give us, to transport ourselves directly to the Place, and, when we have embraced the whole spectacle at a glance, to return an instant to the past, in order to examine the cause, after having contemplated the effect. We might say that Maître Friard was right in estimating a hundred thousand men, at least, as the number of those who would gather on the Place de Grève, and its vicinity, to enjoy the spectacle which was being prepared there. All Paris made a rendezvous of the Hôtel de Ville, and Paris is very exact. Paris never misses a fête, and the death of a man is a fête, and a very extraordinary one, especially when he has succeeded in rousing so many passions that some curse and others bless him, while the greatest number pity him.

The spectator who succeeded in reaching the Place either from the quay near the Inn of the Image of Nôtre Dame, or from the porch of the Place Beaudoyer, perceived at first, in the centre of the Grève, the arches of Tanchon the lieutenant of the short robe, and a goodly number of Swiss and light horse surrounding a small scaffold raised about four feet from the ground.

This scaffold, so low as to be visible only to those who were close to it, or to those who had the good fortune to have a position at some window, was waiting for the victim, of whom the priests had had possession since morning, and for whom, in the effective words of the people, his horses were waiting to bear him away on his long journey. In fact, under an archway of the first building beyond the Rue du Mouton, four strong Percheron horses with white manes and tails, and hairy legs, stamped impatiently on the pavement, bit at one another, and neighed, to the great consternation of the women, who had voluntarily chosen that place, or who had been forcibly driven to it.

The horses were fresh ones. They had scarcely done more than, occasionally, in the grassy meadows of their native country carry on their broad backs the chubby child of some peasant who, delayed, was returning from the fields at set of sun.

But after the empty scaffold, after the neighing horses, that which especially attracted the attention of the crowd was the principal window of the Hôtel de Ville, draped with red velvet and gold, and from the balcony of which hung a velvet rug ornamented with the royal arms. This window was the private box of the King.

Half-past one struck from Saint Jean on the Grève, when the window, like the setting of a picture, began to be filled with persons who took up their positions within its frame.

The first was King Henry III., pale, almost bald, although at this time he was not more than thirty-four or five years old; his eyes were sunk in bluish orbits and his mouth trembled with nervous contractions.

He entered, gloomy, his eyes fixed in their gaze, at once majestic and unsteady, singular in his appearance, singular in his bearing, a shadow rather than a living person, a spectre rather than a king; a mystery always incomprensible, and always misunderstood by his subjects, who, when they saw him

appear, never knew whether to cry, "Long live the King!" or to pray for his soul.

Henry was dressed in a black doublet trimmed with black lace; he wore neither order nor jewels; a solitary diamond shone in his cap, serving as a fastening for three short curled plumes. He carried in his left hand a little black dog which his sister-in-law, Marie Stuart, had sent him from her prison, and on whose silky coat his slender white fingers shone like alabaster.

Behind him came Catharine de Medicis, already bent with age, — for the queen mother must at this time have been sixty-six or seven years old. She still bore her head firm and erect, however, and darted bitter glances from beneath her brow, which was habitually frowning. Yet in spite of this she was like a wax statue, always lifeless and cold in her eternal mourning.

With her appeared the sad but sweet face of Queen Louise of Lorraine, wife of Henry III., apparently an insignificant, but in reality a faithful companion during his tempestuous and unhappy life.

Queen Catharine de Medicis was marching to a triumph; Queen Louise was taking part in an execution; King Henry was attending to business, a triple shade which was visible on the haughty brow of the first, on the resigned features of the second, and on the clouded and weary face of the third.

Behind these illustrious persons, so pale and silent, whom the people admired, came two handsome young men, the one scarcely twenty years of age, the other twenty-five at the most.

They had hold of each other's arms, in spite of the etiquette which, in the presence of a King, as at church in the presence of God, forbids that men should seem attached to anything.

They were smiling; the youngest with ineffable sadness, the oldest with enchanting grace; they were beautiful, and tall, and were brothers.

The youngest was called Henry de Joyeuse, Count du Bouchage; the other, Duke Anne de Joyeuse. Until recently he was known only by the name of Arques; but a year ago King Henry, who loved him above everything else, had created him peer of France, by instituting the viscounty as a dukedom, with a peerage attached to it.

The people had for this favorite none of the hatred which

they once had for Maugiron, Quélus, and Schomberg, a hatred which D'Épernon alone had inherited. Therefore the people hailed the prince and the two brothers by discreet but flattering acclamations.

Henry saluted the crowd gravely, and without a smile ; then he kissed his dog on the head. Afterwards, turning to the young men, he spoke to the elder :

"Lean against the tapestry, Anne, so that you will not grow tired from standing ; this affair may be long."

"Long and good, I trust, sire," interrupted Catharine.

"You think, then, that Salcède will speak, mother ?" asked Henry.

"God, I hope, will give this confusion to our enemies. I say our enemies, for they are your enemies also, my daughter," she added, turning to the Queen, who grew pale, and lowered her gentle eyes.

The King shook his head as though in doubt. Then, turning again to Joyeuse, whom he saw was still standing in spite of his invitation :

"Come, Anne," said he, "do as I say ; lean against the wall, or on the arm of my chair.

"Your Majesty is indeed too good," said the young duke ; "but I will take advantage of the permission only when I actually grow tired."

"And we are not going to wait until you do, are we, brother ?" said Henry in a low voice.

"Do not worry," replied Anne, with his eyes rather than his voice.

"My son," said Catharine, "do I not see some trouble yonder, at the corner of the quay ?"

"What clear eyesight you have, mother ! Yes, indeed, I believe you are right. Oh, what bad eyes I have, and I am not old either !"

"Sire," interrupted Joyeuse freely, "the tumult is caused by the people on the Place being driven back by the company of archers. The prisoner must be arriving."

"How flattering it is for kings to see a man quartered who has a drop of royal blood in his veins !" said Catharine, and as she spoke she looked at Louise.

"Oh ! madame, pardon me, spare me !" said the young queen with a despair she strove in vain to hide ; "no ! this monster does not belong to my family, and you never meant that he did."

"Certainly not," said the King; "and I am very sure that my mother did not mean to say that."

"Well," said Catharine sharply, "he belongs to the Lorraines, and the Lorraines belong to you, madame; I think so, at least. So this Salcède is a relation of yours, a very near one, in fact."

"That is to say," interrupted Joyeuse, with an honest indignation, which was the chief trait of his character, and which under all circumstances was directed against the one, whoever he was, who had aroused it; "that is to say that he is related to Monsieur de Guise, perhaps, but not to the Queen of France."

"Ah! are you there, Monsieur de Joyeuse?" said Catharine with indefinable hauteur, returning an insult for a contradiction. "Ah! are you there? I did not see you."

"I am here, not merely by the permission but by the order of the King, madame," replied Joyeuse, with a questioning glance at Henry. "It is not so diverting to see a man quartered that I should come to such a spectacle, were I not forced to do so."

"Joyeuse is right, madame," said Henry; "we are not here to discuss the Lorraines, nor De Guise, nor, above all, the Queen; we are here to see Monsieur de Salcède, an assassin who wished to kill my brother, cut into four pieces."

"I am unfortunate to-day," said Catharine, immediately giving in, which was her cleverest mode of attack, "I have made my daughter weep, and God forgive me! I believe I have made Monsieur de Joyeuse laugh."

"Ah! madame," cried Louise, seizing Catharine's hand, "is it possible that your Majesty despises my grief?"

"And my profound respect?" added Anne de Joyeuse, leaning on the arm of the royal chair.

"It is true, it is true," replied Catharine, sinking a final shaft into the heart of her daughter-in-law. "I ought to know how painful it is for you, my dear child, to see the plots of your Lorraine relatives revealed; and although you may not be in sympathy with them, you suffer none the less for this relationship."

"Ah! as to that, mother, it is somewhat true," said the King, trying to make peace among them; "for this time we know what to think of Monsieur de Guise's participation in the plot."

"But, sire," interrupted Louise of Lorraine, more boldly than she had as yet done, "your Majesty well knows that in becoming Queen of France I left my relatives far below the throne."

"Oh!" cried Anne de Joyeuse, "you see that I was not mistaken, sire; there is the victim arriving on the Place. *Corbleu!* what an ugly face!"

"He is afraid," said Catharine; "he will speak."

"If he has the strength for it," said the King. "See, mother, his head wobbles like that of a corpse."

"I cannot take my eyes from him, sire; he is horrible."

"How could you expect him to be beautiful — a man whose thoughts are so bad? Have I not explained to you, Anne, the secret connection between the physical and the moral, as Hippocrates and Galen understood and explained them?"

"I do not deny it, sire; but I am not a pupil of your strength, and I have sometimes seen very ugly men who were very brave soldiers. Is it not so, Henry?"

Joyeuse turned to his brother, as though to gain his approval; but Henry looked without seeing, listened without hearing; he was plunged in a deep reverie. It was the King, therefore, who answered for him.

"Well, *Mon Dieu!* my dear Anne," cried he, "who tells you that the man is not brave? He is, *pardieu!* like a bear, like a wolf, like a serpent. Do you not remember his deeds? He burned in his house a Norman gentleman, his enemy; he has fought ten times, and killed three of his adversaries; he has been caught while making counterfeit money, and for this act he has been condemned to death."

"So much so," said Catharine de Medicis, "that he has been pardoned by the intercession of Monsieur le Duc de Guise, your cousin, my daughter."

This time Louise had reached the limit of her strength; she contented herself with heaving a sigh.

"Well," said Joyeuse, "that is a well-filled existence which will soon be finished."

"I trust, Monsieur de Joyeuse," said Catharine, "that it will, on the contrary, be finished as slowly as possible."

"Madame," said Joyeuse, shaking his head, "I see yonder under that awning such strong horses which seem to me so impatient at being obliged to do nothing, that I do not believe

in a very long resistance of the muscles, tendons, and cartilages of Monsieur de Salcède."

"Yes, if they do not provide against such a case; but my son is merciful," added the Queen with one of those smiles which belonged to her alone; "he will have the assistants told to draw gently."

"And yet, madame," objected Queen Louise timidly, "I heard you say this morning to Madame de Mercœur that this wretched man would suffer only two draws."

"Yes, if he conducts himself well," said Catharine, "in that case he will be finished as quickly as possible; but you hear, my daughter, and I wish since you are interested in him that you could tell it to him; whether he conducts himself well concerns himself."

"Ah! madame, God has not given me the strength he gave you, therefore I have not much heart to see suffering."

"Well, do not look, my daughter."

Louise was silent.

The King had heard nothing; he was all eyes, for his assistants were occupied in lifting the culprit from the cart which had brought him, in order to place him on the small scaffold.

In the meantime the halberdiers, the archers, and the Swiss had cleared considerable space, so that around the scaffold there was room enough for every eye to distinguish Salcède in spite of the slight elevation of his funeral pile.

Salcède might have been thirty-four or thirty-five years old; he was strong and vigorous; the pallid features of his face, on which lay drops of perspiration and blood, grew animated as he looked around him with an indescribable expression, now of hope, now of despair.

At first he had turned his eyes toward the royal stand, but as if he had comprehended that it was death instead of pardon which was coming to him from that quarter, his gaze did not linger there.

It was to the crowd he looked, it was in the heart of that stormy sea that he searched with burning eyes, his soul trembling on his lips. The crowd was silent.

Salcède was no common assassin. Salcède, in the first place, was of good birth, since Catharine de Medicis, who was much better informed in genealogy than she appeared to be, had discovered a drop of royal blood in his veins; besides, Salcède had been a captain of some renown. That hand, bound by a shame

ful cord, had valiantly carried a sword; that livid brow on which were painted the terrors of death, terrors which the victim would no doubt have hidden deep down in his soul, if hope had not held too large a place there, — that livid brow had harbored great projects.

From what we have just said it happened that for very many of the spectators Salcède was a hero; for many others, a victim; some, indeed, looked upon him as an assassin, for it is with difficulty that a crowd, in its scorn, places in the rank of ordinary criminals those who have attempted great murders which are registered in the book of history as well as in that of justice.

Thus they whispered in the crowd that Salcède was born of a race of warriors, that his father had fought against Monsieur the Cardinal de Lorraine, which valor had cost him a glorious death in the midst of the massacre of St. Bartholomew; that later, the son, forgetful of this death or rather sacrificing his hatred to a certain ambition for which the people always have some sympathy, that this son, we say, had entered into a compact with Spain and with the De Guises to destroy in Flanders the growing power of the Duc d'Anjou, so deeply hated by the French.

They mentioned his relations with Baza and Balouin, the supposed authors of the plot which had almost cost the life of Duc François, brother of Henry III.; they cited the skill which Salcède had displayed throughout the whole proceeding in order to escape the wheel, the gibbet, and the stake, on which the blood of his accomplices was still smoking; he alone, by revelations false and full of artifice, the Lorraines said, had allured his judges to such a point, that, in order to know more about it, the Duc d'Anjou had spared him temporarily, and had had him sent to France, instead of having him beheaded at Antwerp or Brussels. It is true that he had ended by arriving at the same result, but on the journey, which was the aim of his revelations, Salcède had hoped to be rescued by his partisans; unfortunately for him he had calculated without Monsieur de Bellièvre, who entrusted with this precious charge had kept such good watch that neither Spaniards, nor Lorraines, nor Leaguers had been able to approach within a mile of him.

Salcède in the prison had hoped; he had hoped at the torture; in the cart he had still hoped; now on the scaffold he

was hoping. It was not that he lacked courage or resignation; but he was of those long-lived creatures who defend themselves to their last breath with that tenacity and vigor which the human strength does not always attain in minds of less power.

The King was no more unconscious of this constant thought of Salcède than were the people.

Catharine, on her part, anxiously studied the slightest movement of the unfortunate young man; but she was too far away to follow the direction of his eyes and to notice their continual play.

On the arrival of the prisoner there rose in the crowd, as by magic, tiers of men, women, and children. Each time that he perceived a new head above the moving level, already measured by his vigorous eye, Salcède analyzed it thoroughly in the glance of a second, which sufficed as well as the examination of an hour. To this over-excited organization the last hour becomes very precious, increasing every faculty ten or rather a hundred-fold. After this glance, this lightning-flash hurled upon the new, unknown face, Salcède grew sad and turned his attention elsewhere. However, the executioner had begun to take possession of him, and was binding him by the middle of his body to the centre of the scaffold. Already, even, at a sign from Maître Tanchon, lieutenant of the short robe and commander of the execution, two archers, breaking through the crowd, had gone for the horses.

Under other circumstances or for any other purpose the archers would not have been able to advance a step through the midst of that compact mass; but the people knew what the archers were going to do, and they pressed back and made way, as, on a crowded stage, one always makes room for the actors of important parts.

At this moment there was some commotion at the door of the royal box, and the doorkeeper, raising the tapestry, announced to their Majesties that President Brisson and four councillors, one of whom was the reporter of the affair, desired the honor of conversing a moment with the King on the subject of the execution.

"That is well," said the King.

Then turning to Catharine:

"Well, mother!" he continued, "you are going to be satisfied!"

Catharine gave a slight nod, in evidence of her approval.

"Let the gentlemen enter," said the King.

"Sire, a favor," demanded Joyeuse.

"Speak, Joyeuse, said the King, "and provided that it is not for the condemned man" —

"Reassure yourself, sire."

"I am listening."

"Sire, there is one thing the sight of which especially wounds my brother and myself, that is the red robes and the black; would your Majesty therefore be good enough to let us retire?"

"What! you are so little interested in my affairs, Monsieur de Joyeuse, that you ask to retire at such a time?" cried Henry.

"Do not believe that, sire; all that touches your Majesty is of deep interest to me; but I have a wretched constitution, and the weakest woman is, on this point, stronger than I; I cannot see an execution without being ill for a week. But as there is scarcely any one but myself who laughs at court since my brother no longer laughs, I do not know why, think what would become of this poor Louvre, already so sad, if I took it into my head to make it more melancholy still. So, as a favor, sire" —

"You want to leave me, Anne?" said Henry, in a tone of indescribable sadness.

"The deuce, sire! you are unreasonable; an execution on the Grève is vengeance and a spectacle in one, and what a spectacle! in which, contrary to me, you are the most interested; vengeance and the spectacle are not sufficient for you, it seems necessary for you at the same time to enjoy the weakness of your friends."

"Remain, Joyeuse, remain; you will see that it is interesting."

"I do not doubt it; I even fear, as I have told your Majesty, that the interest may be carried to a point which I cannot stand; therefore, you will permit, will you not, sire?" And Joyeuse made a movement towards the door.

"Well," said Henry III., with a sigh, "do as you please; my destiny is to live alone."

And the King turned, with frowning brow, to his mother, fearing that she had overheard the conversation which had just taken place between him and his favorite.

Catharine's hearing was as good as her eyesight; but when she did not wish to hear, no ear was duller than hers.

Meanwhile, Joyeuse had leaned over to his brother and had whispered to him :

"Quick, quick, Du Bouchage! While the councillors are coming in, let us slip behind their wide robes and get away; the King says 'yes' now; in five minutes he may say 'no.'

"Thanks, thanks, brother," answered the young man; "I am like you, in haste to leave."

"Well, well, here come the ravens; disappear, tender nightingale."

And behind the councillors one might have seen the two young men fleeing like two rapid shadows. Behind them the curtains fell in heavy folds.

When the King turned his head they had already disappeared. Henry heaved a sigh and kissed his little dog.

CHAPTER V.

THE EXECUTION.

The councillors remained standing at the back of the King's box, in silence, waiting for the King to address them.

The King waited a minute, then turning towards them :

"Well, gentlemen, what news?" he asked. "Good morning, Monsieur Brisson."

"Sire," replied the president, with the easy dignity which at court they called his Huguenot courtesy, "we come at the desire of Monsieur de Thou, to beg your Majesty to spare the life of the culprit. He has, no doubt, some revelations to make; and, by promising him his life, these would be obtained."

"But," said the King, "have not the revelations been obtained, Monsieur President?"

"Yes, sire, in part; is that sufficient for your Majesty?"

"I know what I know, monsieur."

"Your Majesty knows, then, what to think of the participation of Spain in this affair?"

"Of Spain? Yes, Monsieur President, and of many other powers."

"It would be important to prove this participation, sire."

"Therefore," interrupted Catharine, "the King has the intention, Monsieur President, to suspend the execution, if the culprit will sign a confession corresponding to his deposition before the judge who put the question to him under torture."

Brisson questioned the King with a glance and a gesture.

"Such is my intention," said Henry, "and I no longer hide it; you may be assured of it, Monsieur Brisson, and may have the culprit informed of it by your lieutenant of the robe."

"Your Majesty has nothing further to recommend?"

"Nothing. But no variation in the confession, or I withdraw my word. It is public, it must be complete."

"Yes, sire, with the names of the compromised persons?"

"With the names, all the names!"

"Even if these names, by the confession of the prisoner, should be tainted with high treason and revolt against the chief head?"

"Even if these names should be those of my nearest relatives!" said the King.

"It shall be done as your Majesty orders."

"I will explain myself, Monsieur Brisson, so there may be no misunderstanding. They shall carry paper and pens to the prisoner, he shall write his confession, showing publicly by this that he refers himself to our mercy. Afterwards, we will see."

"But I may promise?"

"Oh, yes! promise always."

"Come, gentlemen," said the president, dismissing the councillors, and having respectfully saluted the King he went out to join them.

"He will speak, sire," said Louise de Lorraine, trembling from head to foot; "he will speak, and your Majesty will pardon. See how the foam comes to his lips."

"No, no! he is looking for something," said Catharine, "he is looking for something, nothing else. What is he looking for?"

"*Parbleu!*" said Henry III., "it is not difficult to guess; he is looking for Monsieur le Duc de Parme, Monsieur le Duc de Guise; he is looking for monsieur my brother, the most Catholic king."

"Yes, seek! seek! Wait! Do you think that the Place de Grève is an easier place in which to hide than the route from

Flanders ? Do you think that I have not a hundred Bellièvres here to prevent you from descending from the scaffold to which one alone has brought you ? "

Salcède had seen the archers leave in order to bring the horses; he had seen the president and the councillors in the King's box, then he had seen them disappear; he inferred that the King had given the order for his execution. It was then that there appeared on his blue lips the bloody foam noticed by the young queen: the wretched man, in the mortal impatience which was devouring him, bit his lips until the blood came.

"No one! no one!" he murmured, "not one of those who promised me help! Cowards! cowards! cowards!"

The lieutenant Tanchon approached the scaffold and addressed the executioner.

"Make yourself ready, master," said he. The executioner made a sign to the other end of the Place, and one could see the horses cutting their way through the crowd, and leaving behind them a tumultuous furrow, which, like that of the sea, closed behind them.

This furrow was produced by the spectators who drove back or bore down upon the rapid passage of the horses; but the breach in the wall closed again instantly, and at times the first became the last, and *vice versa*, for the strongest pushed into the empty space.

One might then have seen, as the horses passed by, in the corner of the Rue de la Vannerie, a handsome young man jump down from the post on which he was standing, urged forward by a child who appeared to be scarcely fifteen or sixteen years old, and who seemed very eager over this terrible spectacle.

It was our acquaintance the mysterious page and the Vicomte Ernauton de Carmainges.

"Oh! quick, quick," whispered the page into the ear of his companion, "throw yourself into the opening; there is not a minute to lose."

"But we shall be suffocated," replied Ernauton, "you are crazy, my little friend!"

"I want to see, to see close by," said the page, in so imperious a tone that it was easy to perceive that this order came from lips which were accustomed to command.

Ernauton obeyed.

"Press close to the horses, press close to the horses," said the page; "do not leave an inch between you, or we shall never arrive there."

"But before we arrive there you will be torn to pieces."

"Don't trouble about me. Forward! forward!"

"The horses will kick!"

"Take hold of the tail of the last; a horse never kicks when one holds him in that way."

Ernauton, in spite of himself, submitted to the strange influence of the child; he obeyed, and seized the tail of the horse while the page clung to his belt.

Through the midst of the crowd, undulating like a sea, difficult as a thicket, leaving here a flap of a cloak, there a fragment of a doublet, further on the ruffle of a shirt, they arrived at the same time as the horses, to within three feet of the scaffold on which Salcède was writhing in the convulsions of despair.

"Have we arrived?" whispered the young man, gasping and out of breath, as he felt Ernauton stop.

"Yes," replied the vicomte, "fortunately, for I had come to the end of my strength."

"I do not see."

"Come in front of me."

"No, no, not yet. . . . What are they doing?"

"Making slip-knots at the end of the cords."

"And he, what is he doing?"

"He, who?"

"The prisoner."

"His eyes are turning in every direction, as one who is watching for something."

The horses were near enough to the scaffold for the assistants of the executioner to fasten the tracer fixed to their collars to the feet and wrists of Salcède.

Salcède gave a groan when he felt around his ankles the rough contact of the cords, which a slip-knot drew tight about his flesh. He then directed a supreme, an indefinable glance over the whole of that immense Place, over the hundred thousand spectators which he embraced in the range of his vision.

"Monsieur," said the lieutenant Tanchon to him politely, "will it please you to speak to the people before we proceed?"

And he bent over the ear of the prisoner to add in a low tone:

"A good confession . . . to save your life."

Salcède looked at him, into the depths of his soul.

This glance was so eloquent that it seemed to force the truth from the heart of Tanchon, and cause it to mount to his eyes, whence it blazed forth.

Salcède was not deceived by it; he understood that the lieutenant was sincere and would do what he promised.

"You see," went on Tanchon, "they abandon you; there is no other hope in this world than that which I offer you."

"Well!" said Salcède, with a hoarse sigh, "see that there is silence; I am ready to speak."

"It is a confession, written and signed, that the King demands."

"Then untie my hands and give me a pen; I will write."

"Your confession?"

"My confession, yes."

Tanchon, transported with joy, had but to make a sign; the case had been foreseen. An archer held everything ready; he passed to him the inkstand, pens, and paper, which Tanchon placed on the floor of the scaffold.

At the same time they let out about three feet of the cord which bound Salcède's right wrist and raised him on the platform, that he might be able to write.

Salcède, thus seated, began by breathing hard and by making use of his hand to wipe his lips and push back his hair, from which drops of perspiration fell to his knees.

"Come, come," said Tanchon, "make yourself easy, and write everything."

"Oh, have no fear," replied Salcède, reaching out his hand toward the pen; "rest assured, I shall not forget those who forget me."

And at this word he hazarded a last glance.

Without doubt the moment had come for the page to show himself, for seizing the hand of Ernauton:

"Monsieur," said he, "as a favor, take me in your arms and raise me above the heads of those who prevent me from seeing."

"Ah! but you are insatiable, young man, in truth."

"Just this favor, monsieur."

"You abuse."

"I must see the condemned man, do you hear? I must see him."

Then no doubt, as Ernauton did not answer quickly enough to the injunction:

"In pity, monsieur, as a favor!" said he, "I beseech you."

The child was no longer a capricious tyrant, but an irresistible suppliant. Ernauton raised him in his arms, not without some surprise at the delicacy of the body he held in his hands.

The head of the page thus rose above the other heads.

Just as Salcède had taken the pen, in concluding his glance around, he saw the face of the young man and sat stupefied.

At that instant the two fingers of the page were laid on his lips; at once an indescribable joy spread over the face of the victim, like the joy of the rich man when Lazarus let fall a drop of water upon his parched tongue. He had recognized the signal for which he had been waiting with impatience, and which announced help to him.

After several seconds' contemplation Salcède seized the paper which Tanchon, anxious at his hesitation, offered him, and began to write with feverish energy.

"He writes! he writes!" murmured the crowd.

"He writes!" repeated the queen mother in evident joy.

"He writes," said the King. "*Mordieu*, I will pardon him."

Suddenly Salcède interrupted himself to look at the young man.

The latter repeated the same sign, and Salcède began to write again. Then after a short interval he once more interrupted himself to look again. This time the page made a sign with his fingers and with his head.

"Have you finished?" said Tanchon, who had not lost sight of the paper.

"Yes," said Salcède, mechanically.

"Sign, then."

Salcède signed without turning his eyes on the paper, for they were fixed on the young man.

Tanchon held out his hand toward the confession.

"For the King, for the King alone!" said Salcède.

And he handed the paper to the lieutenant of the short robe, with hesitation, like a conquered soldier who gives up his last weapon.

"If you have confessed everything," said the lieutenant, "you are safe, Monsieur Salcède."

A smile of irony mingled with anxiety showed on the lips

of the victim, who seemed to question impatiently his mysterious interlocutor.

At length Ernauton, fatigued, wished to be relieved of his troublesome burden; he opened his arms; the page slipped to the ground.

With him disappeared the vision which had sustained the condemned man.

When Salcède no longer saw him, he looked about for him; then, as though distracted, he cried:

"Well! well!"

No one answered him.

"Ah! quick! quick! Hurry!" said he; "the King has the paper; he is about to read!"

No one stirred.

The King quickly unfolded the confession.

"Oh! a thousand devils!" cried Salcède. "Would they deceive me? Yet I recognized her perfectly. It was she, it was she!"

Scarcely had the King read the first lines than he became furious with indignation.

Then he grew pale, and cried:

"Oh, the wretch! Oh, the wicked man!"

"What is it, my son?" demanded Catharine.

"He retracts, mother; he pretends never to have confessed anything."

"And then?"

"Then he declares Messieurs de Guise innocent, and strangers to all plots."

"Right," stammered Catharine, "if it is true."

"He lies!" cried the King; "he lies like a heathen."

"How do you know that, my son? Messieurs de Guise are perhaps calumniated. The judges in their too great zeal have perhaps wrongly interpreted their depositions."

"Well, madame!" cried Henry, no longer able to control himself. "I heard everything."

"You, my son?"

"Yes, I."

"And when was that, if you please?"

"When the victim was undergoing the torture — I was behind a curtain; I did not lose a single one of his words; and each sank into my memory as a nail under a hammer."

"Well! make him speak under the rack, since the rack is necessary for him; order the horses to draw."

Henry, beside himself with anger, raised his hand.

The lieutenant Tanchon repeated the sign.

The ropes had already been tied to the four limbs of the victim; four men had jumped upon the four horses; four blows of the whip had resounded, and the four horses had bounded in opposite directions.

Instantly a horrible cracking and a fearful cry rose from the floor of the scaffold. The spectators saw the limbs of the wretched Salcède turn blue, lengthen, and spout forth blood; his face was no longer that of a human being; it was the mask of a demon.

"Ah, treason! treason!" he cried. "Ah! I will speak, I will speak; I will tell all! Ah, cursed duch"— the voice rose above the neighing of the horses and the noise of the crowd; but suddenly it ceased.

"Stop! Stop!" cried Catharine.

It was too late. The head of Salcède, lately rigid with suffering and fury, fell suddenly to the floor of the scaffold.

"Let him speak," shouted the queen mother. "Stop! stop!"

The eyes of Salcède were excessively dilated, fixed, and obstinately plunged into the crowd where the page had appeared. Tanchon cleverly followed their direction.

But Salcède could no longer speak; he was dead.

Tanchon in a low voice gave some orders to his archers, who dived into the crowd in the direction indicated by the denouncing eyes of Salcède.

"I am discovered," said the young page into Ernauton's ear; "for pity's sake, help me, assist me, monsieur; they are coming! They are coming!"

"But what more do you wish?"

"To flee; do you not see that it is I whom they seek?"

"But who are you, then?"

"A woman . . . save me! protect me!"

Ernauton grew pale, but generosity prevailed over astonishment and fear.

He placed his *protégée* before him; with great blows forced a passage, and pushed her as far as the corner of the Rue du Mouton, toward an open door.

The incognita sprang forward and disappeared within the open door which instantly closed behind her.

He had not had time even to ask her name or as to where he could find her again.

But on disappearing, the young page, as though she had divined his thought, had made him a sign full of promises.

Once more free, Ernauton returned to the centre of the Place, and embraced at a single glance the scaffold and the royal box.

Salcède was stretched stiff and livid on the scaffold.

Catharine was standing in the box pale and trembling.

"My son," said she at length, wiping the perspiration from her brow, "my son, you will do well to change your executioner; he is a Leaguer!"

"And how do you know that, mother?" asked Henry.

"Look! look!"

"Well, I am looking."

"Salcède suffered only one pull, and he is dead."

"Because he was too sensitive to suffering."

"No! no!" said Catharine, with a smile of scorn called forth by her son's want of perspicuity; "it was because he was strangled from below the scaffold with a fine cord, just as he was about to accuse those who let him die. Have the corpse examined by a clever doctor, and I am sure you will find about his neck the circle which the cord has left there."

"You are right," said Henry, whose eyes shone for an instant, "my cousin De Guise is better served than I."

"Hush! hush! my son," said Catharine, "no noise, they will laugh at us; for this time too it is a lost game."

"Joyeuse did well to go and amuse himself elsewhere," said the King; "one can no longer count on anything in this world, not even on executions. Let us go, ladies, let us go."

CHAPTER VI.

THE TWO JOYEUSES.

Messieurs de Joyeuse, as we have seen, had stolen away during this scene, behind the Hôtel de Ville, and leaving with the carriages of the King their lackeys, who were waiting for them with the horses, walked side by side through the streets of that populous quarter, which that day were deserted, so great was the number of spectators that crowded the Place de Grève.

Once outside they walked with their arms about each other, but without speaking.

Henry, but lately so joyous, was preoccupied and almost sad. Anne seemed restless and as though embarrassed by his brother's silence.

It was he who first spoke.

"Well, Henry," said he, "whither are you taking me?"

"I am not taking you, brother, I am walking in spite of myself," replied Henry, as though he had suddenly wakened.

"Do you want to go anywhere, brother?"

"And you?"

Henry smiled sadly.

"Oh, I!" said he, "it little concerns me where I go."

"Yet you go somewhere every evening," said Anne, "for every evening you go out at the same hour, and you return scarcely before midnight, and sometimes not at all."

"Are you questioning me, brother?" asked Henry, with a charming gentleness, combined with a certain respect for his elder brother.

"I question you?" said Anne. "God forbid! secrets are for those who keep them."

"If you wish it, brother," replied Henry, "I will have no secrets from you; you well know this."

"You will not have secrets from me, Henry?"

"Never, brother; are you not at once my lord and my friend?"

"Well! I thought you had some secrets from me, who am only a poor layman; I thought you had our learned brother that pillar of theology, that torch of religion, that erudite architect in cases of court conscience, who some day will be cardinal; that you confided in him, and that you found in him at once confession, absolution, and, who knows? — and advice; for in our family," added Anne, laughing, "one is good for everything; you know this; witness our very dear father."

Henry du Bouchage seized the hand of his brother and pressed it affectionately.

"You are to me more than director, more than confessor, more than father, my dear Anne," said he, "I tell you again, you are my friend."

"Then, my friend, why from being gay as you used to be, have I seen you little by little becoming sad, and why, instead

of going out in the day-time, you now no longer go out, save at night ? "

" Brother, I am not sad," replied Henry, smiling.

" What are you, then ? "

" I am in love."

" Good ! And this preoccupation ? "

" Comes from my constantly thinking of my love."

" And you sigh in telling me that ? "

" Yes."

" You sigh ? you, Henry, Count du Bouchage; you, the brother of Joyeuse; you, whom evil tongues call the third king of France . . . you know that Monsieur de Guise is the second, if indeed not the first . . . you who are rich; you who are handsome, who, like me, will be peer of France, and, like me, duke, the first chance I have; you are in love; you think, and you sigh; you sigh, you, who took for your emblem *Hilariter* [joyously] ! "

" My dear Anne, neither all these gifts of the past nor all these promises for the future have ever counted with me among the things which were to make my happiness. I have no ambition."

" That is to say you no longer have any."

" Or at least that I do not pursue the things of which you speak."

" Just now, perhaps ; but later you will return to them."

" Never, brother ; I desire nothing, I want nothing."

" But you are wrong, brother. When one is called Joyeuse, that is one of the most beautiful names in France ; when one has a brother the favorite of the King, one desires everything, one wants everything, and one has everything."

Henry dropped his blond head, and shook it sadly.

" Come," said Anne, " here we are quite alone, quite lost. The devil take me ! we have crossed the water so far that we are on the Pont de la Tournelle, and this without having been seen. I do not believe that on this lonely strand, with this cold north wind, near this green water, any one will come to listen to us. Have you anything serious to tell me, Henry ? "

" Nothing, nothing, except that I am in love, and you know that already, brother, since just now I told you."

" But, the devil ! that is not serious," said Anne, stamping his foot. " I too, by the pope, am in love ! "

"Not as I am, brother."

"I too think sometimes of my mistress."

"Yes, but not always."

"I too have troubles and even griefs."

"Yes, but you have joys also, for you are loved."

"Oh! I have great obstacles too; they demand great mysteries of me."

"They demand? You said 'they demand,' brother. If your mistress demands she is yours."

"No doubt she is mine, that is to say, mine and Monsieur de Mayenne's — confidence for confidence, Henry — I have, indeed, the mistress of that *roué*, Mayenne, a girl madly in love with me, who would leave Mayenne instantly if she were not afraid that he would kill her; it is his custom to kill women, you know. Then I detest these Guises, and it amuses me to have a good time at the expense of one of them. Well! I tell you, and repeat it, I have troubles sometimes, and quarrels, but I do not become as sad as a Carthusian friar about it; I have no swollen eyes over it. I continue to laugh, if not always, at least from time to time. Come, tell me whom you love, Henry; is your mistress beautiful, at least?"

"Alas! brother, she is not my mistress."

"Is she beautiful?"

"Too beautiful."

"Her name?"

"I do not know it."

"Come, now!"

"On my honor!"

"My friend, I begin to think it is more serious than I had believed. It is not sadness, by the pope! it is madness."

"She has spoken to me only once, or rather she has spoken only once in my hearing, and from that time I have not even heard the sound of her voice."

"And you have not made inquiries?"

"Of whom?"

"How, of whom? Of the neighbors."

"She lives in a house by herself, and no one knows her."

"Ah! but is she a shadow?"

"She is a woman, tall and beautiful as a nymph, serious and grave as the angel Gabriel."

"How did you become acquainted with her? Where did you meet her?"

"One day I was following a young girl at the cross-ways of the Gypecienne; I entered the little garden which adjoins the church. There is a bench there under the trees. Have you ever been in this garden, brother?"

"Never; but no matter, go on; there is a bench there under the trees. Well?"

"Night was beginning to fall; I lost sight of the young girl, and in looking for her, I came upon this bench."

"Go on, go on; I am listening."

"I caught a glimpse of a woman's dress at one end; I held out my hands.

"'Pardon, monsieur,' suddenly said the voice of a man whom I had not seen, 'pardon.'

"And the hand of the man pressed me back gently but firmly."

"He dared to touch you, Joyeuse?"

"Listen: the man had his face hidden in a sort of monk's hood. I took him for a priest; moreover, he impressed me by the kind and courteous tone of his words, for as he spoke he pointed out to me with his finger, ten feet away, the woman whose white garment had drawn me in that direction, and who was kneeling before the stone bench as if it had been an altar.

"I stopped, brother. It was toward the beginning of September that this adventure happened to me; the air was warm, the violets and the roses planted by friends on the tombs of the enclosure gave out their delicate perfume; the moon broke through a white cloud behind the steeple of the church, and the windows began to shine with silver at the top, while at the bottom they were like gold, from the reflection of the lighted candles. My friend, whether it was the majesty of the place or her own personal dignity, this kneeling woman shone for me in the shadow like a statue of marble, and as though she had been actually carved in marble. She filled me with an indescribable feeling of reverence which made me cold at heart.

"I gazed at her eagerly.

"She bent over the bench, encircled it with her two arms, put her lips to it, and at once I saw her shoulders heave beneath the strain of her sighs and sobs; never have you heard such sobs, brother; never has the sharp steel so sadly torn a heart! Still weeping, she kissed the stone with an abandon

that undid me; her tears moved me; her kisses drove me mad!

"But it was she, by the pope, who was mad!" said Joyeuse; "does one kiss a stone thus, and sob in that way for nothing? Oh! it was a deep grief which made her sob; it was an intense love which caused her to kiss that stone; only whom did she love? For whom was she weeping? For whom was she praying? I do not know."

"But the man — did you not question him?"

"Yes."

"And what did he say?"

"That she had lost her husband."

"Does one weep like that for a husband?" said Joyeuse. "*Pardieu*, a fine answer; and you were satisfied with it?"

"I had to be, since he was not willing to give me any other."

"But the man himself, who is he?"

"A sort of servant, who lives with her."

"His name?"

"He refused to tell me."

"Young? Old?"

"He might be twenty-eight or thirty."

"Well, afterwards? She did not remain all night praying and weeping, did she?"

"No; when she had finished weeping, that is to say, when she had exhausted her tears, when she had used up her lips on the bench, she rose, brother; there was in this woman such mysterious sadness, that instead of approaching her as I would have done to any other woman, I drew back; it was she, therefore, who came to me or rather in my direction, for she did not even see me. Then a ray of moonlight fell on her face, and it seemed to me illumined, resplendent; it had resumed its severe sadness; not another contraction, not a quiver, not a tear; only the wet lines they had left. Her eyes alone still shone; her lips opened gently to breathe in the life which a moment ago had seemed ready to abandon her. She took a few steps in a slow, feeble way, like those who walk in their sleep; the man, thereupon, ran to her and guided her, for she seemed to have forgotten that she was walking on earth. Oh, my brother! what startling beauty, what superhuman power! I have never seen anything on earth like her; sometimes only in my dreams, when heaven has opened, there have descended visions similar to this reality."

"Afterwards, Henry, afterwards," said Anne, in spite of himself taking an interest in the story at which at first he had intended to laugh.

"Oh! it is soon finished, brother, her servant spoke a few words to her in a low tone, whereupon she lowered her veil; doubtless he told her that I was there, but she did not even glance in my direction; she lowered her veil, and I saw her no more, brother. It seemed to me that the sky had become obscured and that she was no longer a living creature, but a shadow escaped from the tombs, which, among the deep grass, glided silently before me.

"She stepped out of the enclosure; I followed her.

"From time to time the man turned round and saw me, for I did not hide myself, completely carried away as I was; what would you have? I had still the old vulgar habits in my mind, the old gross leaven in my heart."

"What do you mean, Henry?" asked Anne; "I do not understand."

The young man smiled.

"I mean, brother," said he, "that my youth has been unrestrained; that I have often thought I was in love, and that all women, up to that moment, were, for me, women to whom I could offer my love."

"Oh! Oh! What is this one, then?" said Joyeuse, striving to resume his gayety, which was somewhat damped in spite of himself by his brother's confidence. "Take care, Henry, you are beginning to wander; was not this one a woman of flesh and bone?"

"Brother," said the young man, seizing the hand of Joyeuse in a feverish grasp, "brother," said he, so low that his breath scarcely reached the ear of the elder one, "as surely as God hears me, I do not know whether she is a creature of this world or not."

"By the pope!" said the other, "you would frighten me if a Joyeuse ever could be afraid."

Then trying to resume his gayety: "But," said he, "at least she walks, weeps, and kisses very well, — you yourself told me so, — and it seems to me that it is a good enough augury, dear friend. But that is not all; come, afterwards, afterwards."

"Afterwards there is very little. I followed her; she did not try to avoid me, to turn aside from the road, or to take a

wrong road in order to throw me off the track. She did not seem even to think of that."

"Well, where does she live?"

"Beside the Bastille, in the Rue de Lesdigvières; at the door her companion turned round and saw me."

"You made him some sign, then, to give him to understand that you wished to speak to him?"

"I did not dare; what I am about to tell you is ridiculous, but the servant over-awed me almost as much as the mistress."

"Never mind; you entered the house?"

"No, brother."

"In truth, Henry, I have half a mind to disown you for a Joyeuse. But at least you returned the following day?"

"Yes, but in vain — in vain to the Gypecienne, in vain to the Rue de Lesdigvières."

"She had disappeared?"

"Like a shadow that had faded away."

"But finally you made inquiries?"

"The street has few inhabitants. No one could satisfy me. I watched for the man in order to question him. He reappeared no more than did the woman. However, a light which I saw shining in the evening through the shutters consoled me by indicating that she was still there. I employed a hundred means to enter the house: letters, messages, flowers, gifts — everything failed. One night the light disappeared and returned no more; the lady, wearied no doubt by my pursuit, had left the Rue de Lesdigvières; no one knew her changed abode."

"Yet you found her again, this beautiful savage?"

"Chance permitted it; I am unjust, brother, it is Providence who does not wish one to drag along such an existence. Listen, for in truth it is strange. I was passing down the Rue de Bussy, two weeks ago, at midnight; you know, brother, that the fire regulations are very strict; well! not only did I see flames at the windows of a house, but a real fire which was beginning to break out on the second story. I rapped loudly on the door; a man appeared at the window. 'Your house is on fire!' I cried. 'Silence! for pity's sake,' said he, 'silence! I am trying to put it out.' 'Do you want me to call the watch?' 'No, no, in Heaven's name, call no one!' 'But perhaps we could help you?' 'Will you come in, then, and you will render me a service for which I will be

grateful to you all my life.' 'And how shall I get in?' 'Here is the key of the door.' And he threw me the key from the window. I rapidly mounted the stairs, and entered the room which was the seat of the fire. It was the floor that was burning; I was in the laboratory of a chemist. In making some experiment, an inflammable liquid had been spilled on the floor; hence the fire. When I entered, the man had it already under control, so that I could examine him. He was twenty-eight or thirty years old; at least he appeared to me to be of this age. A frightful scar furrowed the half of one cheek, another had ploughed its way across his skull; his bushy beard hid the rest of his face. 'I thank you, monsieur, but as you see, it is all over now; if you are as gallant a man as you seem to be, have the goodness to retire, for my mistress may enter at any moment, and she would be irritated to see a stranger in my house, or rather in her house, at this hour.' The sound of this voice rendered me speechless, and almost petrified me. I opened my lips to cry: 'You are the man of the Gypecienne, the man of the Rue de Lesdigvières, the man of the unknown lady!' For you remember, brother, that he was covered with a hood, so that I did not see his face, and had merely heard his voice. I was about to tell him this, to question him, to beg him, when suddenly a door opened and a woman entered. 'What is the matter, Rémy?' she asked, pausing majestically on the threshold, 'and why this noise?' Oh! brother, it was she, more beautiful still in the dying flames of the fire than she had seemed to me in the light of the moon! It was she, it was this woman the constant thought of whom was eating my heart away. At the cry I gave, the servant regarded me more closely.

"'Thanks, monsieur,' said he, again. 'Thanks; but as you see, the fire is extinguished. Go, I beg you, go.'

"'My friend,' said I to him, 'you send me away very roughly.'

"'Madame,' said the servant, 'it is he.'

"'He? Who?' she asked.

"'The young cavalier whom we met in the garden of the Gypecienne, and who followed us to the Rue de Lesdigvières.'

She fixed her eyes on me, and by this look I understood that she saw me for the first time. 'Monsieur,' said she, 'as a favor, go away!' I hesitated, I longed to speak, to implore; but words failed me; I stood motionless and mute, gazing at her.

"'Take care, monsieur,' said the servant with greater sadness than severity, 'take care, or you will compel madame to flee a second time.' 'Ah! God forbid!' I exclaimed, bowing; 'but, madame, I do not offend you?' She did not answer me. As insensible, as mute, as cold as though she had not heard me, she turned away, and I saw her disappear gradually in the dark, descending the steps of a staircase, on which her footfall made no more noise than that of a phantom."

"And that was all?" asked Joyeuse.

"That was all. The servant conducted me to the door, saying: 'Forget, monsieur, in the name of Jesus and the Virgin Mary; forget, I beg you!' I fled, distracted, half wild, stupefied, pressing my head between my hands, and asking myself if I were not going mad. Since then I have gone every evening to that street, and that was why, as we started from the Hôtel de Ville, my steps very naturally turned in that direction; every evening, as I said, I go to that street, I hide in an angle of a house which is opposite hers, beneath a little balcony, the shadow of which completely conceals me; once in ten times I see a light in the chamber which she occupies; there is my life; there is my happiness."

"What happiness!" cried Joyeuse.

"Alas! I should lose it if I desired more."

"But if you lose yourself by this resignation?"

"Brother," said Henry, with a mournful smile; "what would you have? I am happy thus."

"It is impossible!"

"What do you mean? Happiness is relative; I know that she is there, that she lives there, that she breathes there; I see her through the wall; or rather I seem to see her; if she were to leave this house, if I were to pass another two weeks like those I spent when I had lost her, I should go mad, or become a monk."

"No, *mordieu!* There are already enough madmen and monks in the family; let us stop it now, my dear friend."

"No observations, Anne, no raillery; observations would be useless, raillery would effect nothing."

"And who is speaking to you of observations or raillery?"

"Very well. But" —

"Let me tell you one thing."

"What?"

"That you have been taken in like an inexperienced schoolboy."

"I made neither combinations nor calculations, I have not been taken in, I gave myself up to something which was stronger than I. When a current bears you away, it is better to follow the current than to struggle against it."

"And if it leads to some abyss?"

"You must fall into it, brother."

"This is your idea?"

"Yes."

"It is not mine, and in your place" —

"What would you have done, Anne?"

"Enough, certainly, to have discovered her name, her age. In your place" —

"Anne, Anne, you do not know her."

"No, but I know you. Why, Henry, you had fifty thousand crowns which I gave you, besides the hundred thousand which the King made me a present of at his fête" —

"They are still in my chest, Anne. Not one is missing."

"*Mordieu!* So much the worse! If they were not in your chest the woman would be in your alcove."

"Oh, brother!"

"There is no 'Oh, brother!' about it; a servant is usually bought for ten crowns, a good one for a hundred, an excellent one for a thousand, a marvellous one for three thousand. Let us see, now. Let us suppose this one the phœnix of servants; let us imagine him the model of fidelity. Yet with the help of twenty thousand pounds, by the pope! he would be yours. Then there remain one hundred and thirty thousand pounds to pay the phœnix of women, delivered by the phœnix of servants. Henry, my friend, you are a ninny."

"Anne," said Henry, sighing, "there are people who do not sell themselves; there are hearts which even a king is not rich enough to buy."

Joyeuse grew calm.

"Well, I admit that," said he; "but there are none who do not give themselves."

"Well?"

"Well? What have you done that the heart of this cold beauty should give itself to you?"

"I have a conviction, Anne, that I have done all that I could do."

"Well, then, Count du Bouchage, you are mad! You see a woman sad, shut up, grieving, and you make yourself more

sad, more of a recluse, more given to grieving; that is, more tiresome than she herself! In truth you spoke of the ordinary ways of love, and you are as commonplace as a police officer. She is alone; be company for her. She is sad; be gay. She mourns; console her and make up for her loss."

"Impossible, brother."

"Have you tried?"

"Why do it?"

"Well! If only to try. You are in love, you say?"

"I know no words in which to express my love."

"Well, in two weeks you shall have your mistress."

"Brother!"

"Faith of a Joyeuse! You have not given up hope, I trust?"

"No, for I have never hoped."

"At what hour do you see her?"

"At what hour do I see her?"

"Yes."

"But I tell you that I do not see her, brother."

"Never?"

"Never."

"Not even at her window?"

"Not even her shadow, I tell you."

"That must stop. Come, has she a lover?"

"I have never seen a man enter her house, except this Rémy of whom I told you."

"What sort of a house is it?"

"Two stories, a small door on a step, a terrace above the second window."

"But could one not enter from this terrace?"

"It is separated from the other houses."

"And opposite, what is there?"

"Another house very similar, although more elevated, it seems to me."

"By whom is this house inhabited?"

"By a sort of bourgeois."

"Of a bad or a good disposition?"

"Of a good disposition, for sometimes I hear him laughing all alone."

"Buy his house from him."

"Who told you that it was for sale?"

"Offer him double its value."

"And if the lady sees me there" —

"Well?"

"— she will disappear again, while by concealing my presence I hope some day or other to see her once more."

"You shall see her this evening."

"I?"

"Take your stand beneath her balcony at eight o'clock."

"I shall be there, as I am every day, but without more hope than on other days."

"By the way! The right address?"

"Between the Porte Bussy and the Hôtel Saint-Denis, almost at the corner of the Rue des Augustins, twenty steps from a large inn, bearing the sign, *The Sword of the Proud Chevalier.*"

"Very well; at eight this evening."

"But what will you do?"

"You will see, you will hear. Meanwhile, return home, don your most beautiful clothes, put on your richest jewels, perfume your hair with your finest essences; this evening you shall enter the house."

"May God hear you, brother!"

"Henry, when God is deaf, the devil is not. I leave you, my mistress awaits me; no, I mean the mistress of Monsieur de Mayenne. By the pope! *she* is not prudish."

"Brother!"

"Pardon, beautiful servant of love; I will make no other comparison between these two ladies, you may be sure, although after what you tell me I love better mine, or rather ours. But she is expecting me, and I do not wish to keep her waiting. Adieu, Henry, until this evening."

"Until this evening, Anne."

The two brothers grasped hands and separated.

The one, at the end of two hundred steps, boldly raised and noisily let fall the knocker of a beautiful gothic house situated in the square of Nôtre Dame.

The other plunged silently into one of the tortuous streets which lead to the Palais.

CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH THE SWORD OF THE PROUD CHEVALIER WINS OVER THE ROSE-TREE OF LOVE.

During the conversation which we have just reported, night had fallen, enveloping in its damp cloak of fog the city, which, two hours previous, had been so noisy.

Salcède dead, the spectators had thought of returning to their homes, and one saw only some scattered groups, instead of that uninterrupted chain of people who during the day had rushed together to one common point.

Even in the most distant quarters of the Grève there were some remains of the earthquake, which may easily be understood, after the prolonged agitation of the centre.

Thus in the quarter of the Porte Bussy, for instance, whither we must transport ourselves at this hour, in order to follow some of the personages whom we put on the stage in the beginning of our story, and in order to make the acquaintance of some new ones, — in this quarter, we say, there was heard a buzzing like a swarm of bees at sunset, in a certain rose-colored house, decorated with blue and white paintings, which was called *The Sword of The Proud Chevalier*, but which was only an inn of gigantic proportions recently built in the new quarter. At this time Paris could not boast of a single good inn which did not have its triumphant sign. *The Sword of The Proud Chevalier* was one of these magnificent exhibitions, destined to satisfy all tastes and to answer all sympathies.

There was painted on the entablature the combat between an archangel or a saint and a dragon, darting forth, like the monster of Hippolytus, torrents of flame and smoke. The painter, animated by a sentiment at once heroic and pious, had placed in the hands of the proud chevalier, armed *cap-a-pie*, not a sword, but an immense cross, with which he was cutting in two more cleverly than with the sharpest blade the unfortunate dragon, whose fragments lay bleeding on the ground.

There were to be seen at the bottom of the sign, or rather of the picture, for the sign was certainly deserving of this name, — there were to be seen quantities of spectators raising their

arms to Heaven, while in the sky, angels were dropping laurels and palms upon the helmet of the proud chevalier.

Finally, in the first design, the artist, anxious to prove that he could paint everything, had grouped together pumpkins, grapes, beetles, lizards, a snail on a rose; and lastly, two rabbits, one white, the other gray, which in spite of the difference in color, that might have indicated a difference of opinion, were scratching each other's nose, in probable delight at the memorable victory obtained by the proud chevalier over the symbolic dragon who was no other than Satan. Assuredly, unless the proprietor of the sign were difficult to please, he would have been satisfied with the conscience of the painter. In fact, the artist had not lost a line of space, and if it had been necessary to add a worm to the picture, room would have been lacking. Now let us confess one thing, and this avowal, although painful, is forced upon our conscience as story-teller, it did not follow from this fine sign that the inn was filled as it was in its prosperous days; on the contrary, for reasons which we shall presently explain, and which we hope the public will understand, there were, we will not say even occasionally but almost always, great empty rooms at the inn of *The Proud Chevalier*.

Yet, as they would say in our day, the house was roomy and comfortable; square in shape, and affixed to the ground by a firm foundation. Above its sign it spread out in a superb way four towers, each containing its octagon chamber; the whole built, it is true, from large boards, but coquettish and mysterious looking as should be the case with every house that wishes to please men, and especially women; but therein lay the evil; we cannot please every one. Such, however, was not the conviction of Dame Fournichon, hostess of *The Proud Chevalier*. In consequence of this conviction, she had prevailed upon her husband to give up a bathing-house in which they were vegetating in the Rue Saint-Honoré, in order to turn the spit and tap the wine for the benefit of the lovers of the Bussy cross-roads, and even from other quarters of Paris. Unfortunately for the hopes of Dame Fournichon, her inn was situated somewhat near to the Pré-aux-Clercs, so that, attracted both by the neighborhood and the sign, *The Sword of The Proud Chevalier*, there came so many couples ready to fight that others less belligerent fled from the poor inn as from a plague, in the fear of noise and unexpected attacks. Lovers are a peaceful

people who do not like to be disturbed, so that in these gallant little towers it was necessary to lodge only weather-beaten soldiers, and all the cupids represented on the panels of wood by the painter of the sign had been decorated with mustaches and other appendages, more or less proper, by the charcoal of the regular patrons.

Therefore Dame Fournichon claimed, and, until then, not without reason, it must be admitted, that the sign had brought ill luck to the house, and she affirmed that if they had been willing to yield to her experience, and to paint above the door, instead of the proud cavalier and the hideous dragon, which repelled every one, something gallant, as, for instance, the *Rose-tree of Love*, with hearts inflamed instead of roses, all the tender souls would have chosen her inn as their abode.

Unfortunately, Maître Fournichon, incapable of acknowledging that he repented of his idea, and the effect that the idea had had on his sign, took no account of the suggestions of his housekeeper, and answered, shrugging his shoulders, that he, the old standard-bearer of Monsieur Danville, ought naturally to look for patronage among the soldiers; he added that a reiter,[1] who thought of nothing but drinking, consumes as much as six lovers, and that should he pay only the half of the bill, they would still make money, since the most prodigal lovers never pay as well as three reiters.

Moreover, he concluded, wine is more moral than love.

At these words Dame Fournichon, in turn, would shrug her plump shoulders in such a way as to cause an evil interpretation to be put on her ideas in the matter of morals. Things were at this divided state in the Fournichon household, and the couple were vegetating in the Rue Bussy, as they had vegetated in the Rue Saint Honoré, when an unforeseen circumstance occurred to change the face of things, and to cause the ideas of Maître Fournichon to triumph, to the greatest glory of that worthy sign, in which every kingdom of nature had its representative.

One month before the execution of Salcède, at the close of some military exercises which had taken place in the Pré-aux-Clercs, Dame Fournichon and her husband were each sitting, according to habit, in an angular tower of their establishment, idle, dreary, and indifferent, because all the tables and all the rooms of the inn of *The Proud Chevalier* were completely empty.

[1] German horse-soldier of the fourteenth and fifteenth century. — *Tr.*

On that day the *Rose-tree of Love* had given no roses.

On that day *The Sword of The Proud Chevalier* had not been drawn.

The couple, therefore, were gazing sadly at the plain, whence the soldiers whom the captain had just been drilling were disappearing, to embark in the ferry-boat from the Tour de Nesle, and return to the Louvre; and as they watched them and groaned over the military despotism, which forced the body-guard of soldiers, who must naturally have been so thirsty, to return, they saw the captain put his horse to the trot, and advance, with a single orderly, in the direction of the Porte Bussy.

In ten minutes this plumed officer, seated proudly on his white steed, and whose sword in its gilt scabbard raised a beautiful cloak of cloth of Flanders, was in front of the inn.

But as it was not to the inn that he was bound, he was about to pass by without even having admired the sign, for he seemed care-worn and preoccupied, when Maître Fournichon, whose heart failed him at the thought of not entertaining any one that day, leaned out of his tower, and cried:

"Look, wife, what a fine horse!" To which Madame Fournichon replied affably, in true inn style:

"And what a handsome cavalier, too!"

The captain, who did not seem insensible to flattery, no matter whence it came, raised his head as though he had suddenly awakened. He saw the host, the hostess, and the inn, reined in his horse, and called his orderly.

Then, still in the saddle, he looked attentively at the house and the quarter.

Fournichon had run down the stairs four steps at a time, and was standing at the door twisting his cap between his two hands.

The captain, having reflected a few minutes, dismounted.

"Is there no one here?" said he.

"Not just now, monsieur," replied the host, humiliated.

And he hastened to add:

"However, such is not the habit of the house."

But Dame Fournichon, like almost all women, was more clear-sighted than her husband; consequently she hastened to cry aloud from the window:

"If monsieur seeks solitude, he will be perfectly comfortable with us."

The cavalier raised his head, and seeing the kind face, after hearing the kind words, replied:

"For the present, yes; that is exactly what I am looking for, my good woman."

Dame Fournichon at once hastened to meet the traveller, and said:

"This time it is the *Rose-tree of Love* that entertains and not *The Sword of The Proud Chevalier.*"

The captain who, at that time, was attracting the attention of the couple, and who at the same time deserves to attract that of the reader, was a man thirty or thirty-five years of age, but who seemed twenty-eight, such care had he taken of his person. He was tall, well formed, with expressive and refined features; perhaps on close examination one might have discovered some affectation in his lordly manner; but affected or not, his manner was courtly. He threw into the hands of his companion the bridle of the magnificent horse which was stamping the ground, and said to him:

"Wait for me here, while you walk the horses about."

The soldier took the bridle and obeyed.

Once within the large room of the inn, the cavalier paused, and throwing a glance of satisfaction about him:

"Oh! oh!" he exclaimed, "such an immense room, and not a drinker! Good!"

Maître Fournichon regarded him in astonishment, while Madame Fournichon smiled upon him intelligently.

"But," continued the captain, "there is, then, something in your conduct, or in your house, which keeps drinkers away from you?"

"Neither the one nor the other, monsieur, thank God!" replied Madame Fournichon; "but the quarter is new, and as to customers, we choose."

"Ah! very good," said the captain.

"For instance," she continued, with a certain wink of the eye, which revealed the author of the project of the *Rose-tree of Love*, "for instance, for one customer like your lordship we would willingly give up a dozen."

"That is polite, my pretty hostess. Thanks."

"Does monsieur wish to taste some wine?" said Fournichon, in his least rasping tone.

"Does monsieur wish to see the rooms?" said Madame Fournichon, in her sweetest voice.

"Both, if you please," replied the captain.

Fournichon descended into the cellar, while his wife pointed out to her guest the stairway leading to the towers, upon which, having tucked up her coquettish skirt, she already had preceded him, at every step making her real Parisian slippers creak.

"How many persons can you lodge here?" asked the captain, when he had reached the first floor.

"Thirty, of whom ten can be men."

"That is not enough, pretty hostess," replied the captain.

"Why not, monsieur?"

"I had a project; let us say no more about it."

"Ah! monsieur, you will certainly not find a better inn than the *Rose-tree of Love*."

"What! the *Rose-tree of Love?*"

"*The Proud Chevalier*, I mean, and unless having the Louvre and its dependencies" —

The stranger gave her a singular glance.

"You are right," said he; "and unless the Louvre" —

Then, aside:

"Why not?" he continued; "it would be more convenient, and less expensive. You say, then, my good dame," he resumed aloud, "that you could accommodate thirty persons here?"

"Yes, without doubt."

"But for a day?"

"Oh! for one day, forty or even forty-five."

"Forty-five! *parfandious!* that is just my number."

"Indeed! see how fortunate it is, then."

"And without its causing gossip outside?"

"Sometimes on Sundays we have eighty soldiers here."

"And no crowd in front of the house? No spy among the neighbors?"

"Oh, my God, no! We have for neighbors only a worthy bourgeois, who meddles with nobody's affairs, and a lady who lives such a retired life that for the three weeks she has lived in the quarter I have not seen her once; all the others are working people."

"That suits me wonderfully well."

"So much the better," said Madame Fournichon.

"And one month from to-day," continued the captain, "remember that, madame, — one month from to-day."

"The twenty-sixth of October, then?"

"Exactly; the twenty-sixth of October."

"Well?"

"Well, the twenty-sixth of October I will hire your inn."

"The whole of it?"

"The whole of it. I want to give a surprise to some countrymen, officers, or at least soldiers, for the most part, who are coming to Paris to seek their fortune; between now and then they will have received word to come to you."

"And how will they have received this word if it is a surprise you are giving them?" imprudently demanded Madame Fournichon.

"Ah!" replied the captain, visibly embarrassed by the question; "ah! if you are inquisitive or indiscreet, *parfandious!*"

"No, no, monsieur," Madame Fournichon hastened to say, becoming frightened. Fournichon had overheard; at the words "officers or soldiers" his heart had leaped with joy. He ran in.

"Monsieur," said he, "you shall be master here, the despot of the house, and without a question from us, my God! All your friends shall be welcome."

"I did not say friends, my good fellow," said the captain, haughtily. "I said my countrymen."

"Yes, yes, the countrymen of his lordship; it is I who made the mistake."

Dame Fournichon turned her back in ill humor; the roses of love had changed into bushes of halberds.

"You will give them supper," went on the captain.

"Very well."

"You will even let them rest, if necessary, if I have not been able to secure lodgings for them."

"Gladly."

"In a word, you will put yourselves at their entire disposal, without questioning them in the least."

"That is understood."

"Here are thirty pounds as earnest money."

"The bargain is concluded, my lord. Your countrymen shall be treated like kings, and if you wish to convince yourself of this by tasting the wine" —

"I never drink, thanks."

The captain approached the window and called the orderly with the horses.

In the meantime, Maître Fournichon had reflected.

"My lord," said he (since the receipt of the three pistoles so generously paid in advance, Maître Fournichon addressed the stranger as "my lord"), "my lord, how am I to recognize these gentlemen?"

"That is so, *parfandious!* I forgot; give me some wax, a piece of paper, and a light."

Dame Fournichon brought them. The captain pressed on the flaming wax the bezel of a ring which he wore on his left hand.

"There," said he, "you see this figure?"

"A beautiful woman, in faith."

"Yes, it is a Cleopatra; well, each one of my countrymen will bring you a similar stamp; you will therefore lodge the bearer of this stamp. That is understood, is it not?"

"For how long?"

"I do not know yet; you will receive my orders on the subject."

"We shall await them."

The handsome cavalier descended the staircase, sprang into his saddle, and departed at a trot.

While awaiting his return the Fournichons pocketed their thirty pounds of earnest money, to the great joy of the host, who did not cease to reiterate:

"Soldiers! well, decidedly the sign is not wrong, and it is by the sword that we shall make our fortune."

And he set to work to polish all his saucepans, while looking forward to the famous twenty-sixth of October.

CHAPTER VIII.

SKETCH OF THE GASCON.

To say that Dame Fournichon was as absolutely discreet as the stranger had recommended her to be, we should not venture. Moreover, no doubt she thought herself exempt from all obligation to him, by the gift which he had given Maître Fournichon at the inn of *The Sword of The Proud Chevalier*, but as there still remained more for her to guess than she had been told, in order to establish her suppositions on a solid

basis she began by trying to discover who was the unknown cavalier who had paid so generously for the hospitality of his fellow-countrymen.

Therefore she did not fail to question the first soldier whom she saw pass, as to the name of the captain who had commanded the review.

The soldier, who probably was more discreet than his interlocutor, demanded first, before replying, for what reason she asked the question.

"Because he has just left here," replied Madame Fournichon, "because he talked with us, and because one wishes to know to whom one speaks."

The soldier began to laugh.

"The captain who commanded the review would not have entered *The Sword of The Proud Chevalier*, Madame Fournichon," said he.

"Why not?" asked the hostess; "is he then too great a lord for that?"

"Possibly."

"Well, if I told you that it was not for himself that he entered the inn of *The Proud Chevalier*"—

"And for whom, then?"

"For his friends."

"And the captain who commanded the review would not lodge his friends at *The Sword of The Proud Chevalier*, I am positive."

"Plague it! How you go on, my good man! And who, pray, is this gentleman who is too great a lord to lodge his friends in the best inn of Paris?"

"You are speaking of the commander of the review, are you not?"

"Without doubt."

"Well, my good woman, the commander of the review is purely and simply Monsieur le Duc Nogaret de la Valette d'Épernon, peer of France, colonel-general of the Infantry of the King, and somewhat more of a king than his Majesty himself. So what do you say to that?"

"That if it is he who came, he did me honor."

"Did you hear him say '*parfandious*'?"

"Well! well!" said Dame Fournichon, who had seen many extraordinary things in her life, and to whom the word "*parfandious*" was not wholly unknown.

Now one can judge if the twenty-sixth of October was awaited with impatience.

On the evening of the twenty-fifth a man entered, carrying a rather heavy bag, which he laid on the buffet of the Fournichons.

"This is the price of the supper ordered for to-morrow," said he.

"At how much a head?" asked both Fournichons at once.

"Six pounds."

"Will the countrymen of the captain have only one meal here?"

"Only one."

"The captain has found rooms for them, then?"

"Apparently."

And the messenger went out in spite of the questions of the *Rose-tree* and the *Sword*, not wishing to reply further to any of them.

At length the longed-for day dawned on the kitchens of *The Proud Chevalier*.

Half-past twelve had just struck from the Augustins, when some horsemen drew up before the door of the inn, dismounted, and went in.

They had come by the Porte Bussy, and naturally were the earliest arrivals, in the first place because they had horses, then because the inn of the *Sword* was scarcely a hundred feet from the Porte Bussy.

One of them, indeed, who seemed their leader, as much by his fine bearing as by his elegant surroundings, had come with two well-mounted lackeys.

Each of them showed his seal with the image of Cleopatra, and was received by the Fournichons with all sorts of attentions, especially the young man with the two lackeys.

However, with the exception of the latter, the newcomers installed themselves but timidly, and with a certain anxiety; one could see that something serious was occupying their minds, especially when they mechanically carried their hands to their pockets.

Some asked to rest themselves, others to stroll about the city before supper; the young man with the two lackeys asked if there was nothing new to see in Paris.

"Faith!" said Dame Fournichon, impressed by the fine appearance of the cavalier, "if you are not afraid of the crowd,

and if you do not mind being on your legs for four hours at a time, you can amuse yourself by going to see Monsieur de Salcède, a Spaniard, who has conspired."

"Why," said the young man, "that is true; I have heard of the affair; I will go there, *pardioux!*" And he left with his two lackeys. About two o'clock there arrived, in groups of four or five, a dozen or so new travellers.

Some of them came alone. There was one, even, who entered like a neighbor, without a hat, a switch in his hand; he swore against Paris, where the robbers were so bold that his hat had been stolen from him so skilfully, as he passed by a group near the Grève, that he had been unable to see who had taken it.

For the rest, it was his own fault. He should not have entered Paris with a hat ornamented with such a magnificent clasp.

Toward four o'clock there were already forty compatriots of the captain installed in the inn of the Fournichons.

"Is it not strange," said the host to his wife, "they are all Gascons?"

"Do you think that strange?" replied the dame; "did not the captain say that they were his countrymen whom he was to receive?"

"Well?"

"Since he is a Gascon himself, his countrymen must be Gascons."

"Yes, that is true," said the host.

"Is not Monsieur d'Épernon from Toulouse?"

"True! True! You still have the idea, then, that it is Monsieur d'Épernon?"

"Did he not let out three times the famous *parfandious?*"

"He has let out the famous *parfandious?*" said Fournichon, perplexed. "What sort of an animal is that?"

"Imbecile! It is his favorite oath."

"Ah! That is so."

"You may be surprised at only one thing; that is, at having but forty Gascons when you should have forty-five."

But about five o'clock the five other Gascons arrived, and the number of guests at the *Sword* was complete. Never did such surprise light up Gascon faces. For an hour there were *sandioux; mordioux; cap de Bious;* in fact, outbursts of joy so noisy that it seemed to the Fournichons as

though all Saintonge, all Poitou, all Aunis, and all Languedoc had burst into their great room. Some were acquainted with one another; hence Eustache de Miradoux came forward to embrace the cavalier with the two lackeys, and presented Lardille, Militor, and Scipio to him.

"By what chance are you in Paris?" said he.

"But, you, my dear Saint Maline."

"I have a post in the army, and you?"

"I come on a matter of inheritance."

"Ah! ah! And you always drag old Lardille after you?"

"She would follow me."

"Could you not leave secretly, instead of embarrassing yourself with all this crowd that clings to her skirts?"

"Impossible, it was she who opened the letter from the procurator."

"Ah! you received news of this inheritance by letter?" demanded Saint Maline.

"Yes," replied Miradoux. Then hastening to change the subject:

"Is it not singular," said he, "that this inn is full, and full of countrymen only?"

"No, it is not singular; the sign is tempting to men of honor," interrupted our old friend Perducas de Pincornay, mingling in the conversation.

"Ah! ah! Is it you, my friend?" said Saint Maline; "you have not explained to me what you were telling me near the Place de Grève when this great crowd separated us."

"What was I going to explain to you?" demanded Pincornay, growing somewhat red.

"Why, between Angoulême and Angers, I met you on the road, as I see you to-day, on foot, without a hat, a switch in your hand."

"Does your mind dwell on this, monsieur?"

"Faith! yes!" said Saint Maline, "it is far from Poitiers here, and you come from beyond Poitiers."

"I come from Saint André de Cubsac."

"Ah! and like this, without a hat?"

"That is easily explained."

"I do not think so."

"Well, you will. My father has two magnificent horses, to which he is so greatly attached that he is likely to disinherit me, since the accident that happened to me."

"What accident happened to you?"

"I was riding one of the horses, the finer of the two, when all at once a gun went off not ten feet from me; my horse became frightened at the sound, started off, and took the road to the Dordogne."

"Where he fell in?"

"Exactly."

"With you?"

"No; luckily, I had time to slip off, otherwise I should have been drowned with him."

"Ah! ah! so the poor beast was drowned?"

"By Heavens! You know the Dordogne, a half a mile wide."

"And then?"

"Then I decided not to return home, but to get away as far as possible from my father's anger."

"But your hat?"

"Now wait; the devil! my hat fell off."

"Like you?"

"I did not fall off; I let myself slip down. A Pincornay does not fall off his horse; the Pincornays are riders in their swaddling-clothes."

"That is well known," said Saint Maline; "but your hat?"

"Ah! yes; my hat?"

"Yes."

"My hat fell off. I set out to find it, for it was my only resource, having started without money."

"But how could your hat be a resource to you?" insisted Saint Maline, determined to drive Pincornay to the wall.

"By Heavens! it was a great one! I must tell you that the plume of this hat was held in place by a diamond clasp, which his Majesty the Emperor Charles V. gave to my grandfather, when on his return from Spain to Flanders he stopped at our château."

"Ah! Ah! And you have sold the clasp and the hat with it? Then, my dear friend, you ought to be the richest of all of us, and with the money from your clasp you ought to have bought a second glove. You have dissimilar hands: one is white, like the hand of a woman, the other is as black as that of a negro."

"Wait a bit; just as I was turning back to look for my hat I saw an enormous raven swoop down from above."

"On your hat?"

"On my diamond rather; you know this bird steals everything that shines, so he swooped down on my diamond and stole it."

"Your diamond?"

"Yes, monsieur. At first, I followed him with my eyes; then I started to run, shouting out 'Stop! stop! thief!' Plague on it! at the end of five minutes he had disappeared, and I have never heard a word of him since."

"So that overwhelmed by this double loss" —

"I did not dare to return to my father's home, and I decided to come to Paris to seek my fortune."

"Good!" said a third, "the wind, then, is changed into a raven? It seems to me I heard you telling Monsieur de Loignac, that, while you were occupied in reading a letter from your mistress, the wind carried off letter and hat, and that like a true Amadis, you ran after the letter, letting the hat go whither it would?"

"Monsieur," said Saint Maline, "I have the honor of being acquainted with Monsieur d'Aubigné, who, although a very brave soldier, handles the pen also; tell him, when you meet him, the history of your hat, and he will make a charming story of it."

Some half-stifled laughter was heard.

"Well! well! gentlemen," said the irritable Gascon, "are you making fun of me?"

Each one turned round in order to laugh more at his ease. Perducas threw a questioning glance about him, and saw near the chimney a young man who was hiding his head in his hands; he thought that he was doing this only to conceal himself the better.

He went to him.

"Well! monsieur," said he, "if you laugh, at least laugh openly, that one may see your face."

And he touched the shoulder of the young man, who raised a grave and serious brow. The latter was none other than our friend Ernauton de Carmainges, still completely mystified by his adventure on the Grève.

"I beg you to leave me alone, monsieur," said he, "and especially, if you touch me again, to use the hand on which you wear your glove; you see very well that I am not concerned with you."

"Very good!" growled Pincornay, "if you are not concerned with me, I have nothing to say."

"Ah! monsieur," said Eustache de Miradoux to Carmainges, with the kindest intentions, "you are not gracious to our countryman."

"And why the devil do you interfere, monsieur?" said Ernauton, more and more vexed.

"You are right, monsieur," said Miradoux, bowing, "it does not concern me."

He turned on his heels to rejoin Lardille, who was seated in a corner of the wide chimney; but some one barred his passage. It was Militor, with both hands in his belt, and his sly smile on his lips.

"Come, tell us, step-father," said the good-for-nothing fellow.

"Well?"

"What do you say about it?"

"About what?"

"About the manner in which this gentleman clinched the argument?"

"What?"

"He shook you in fine style."

"Ah! you noticed that, did you?" said Eustache, trying to turn Militor aside.

But the latter frustrated the intention by stepping to the left, and again facing him:

"Not I alone," continued Militor, "all of us noticed it; see how every one around us is laughing."

The fact is they were laughing, but not more at that than at anything else.

Eustache became as red as a glowing coal.

"Come! come, step-father, don't let the affair cool off," said Militor.

The pride of Eustache was touched, and approaching De Carmainges:

"They say, monsieur," said he, "that you wished to be especially disagreeable to me."

"When was that?"

"Just now."

"To you?"

"To me."

"And who says that?"

"Monsieur," said Eustache, indicating Militor.

"Then *monsieur*," replied Carmainges, lingering ironically on the word, "then *monsieur* is a starling."

"Oh! oh!" cried Militor, furious.

"And I advise him," continued Carmainges, "not to come thrusting his bill at me, or I shall recall the words of Monsieur de Loignac."

"Monsieur de Loignac did not say that I was a starling, monsieur."

"No; he said that you were an ass; do you prefer that? It makes little difference to me: if you are an ass, I will beat you; if you are a starling, I will pull out your feathers."

"Monsieur," said Eustache, "this is my step-son; treat him better, I beg you, out of regard for me."

"Ah! how you protect me, step-father!" cried Militor, exasperated; "if it is in this way, I can defend myself better alone."

"To school with the children!" said Ernauton, "to school!"

"To school!" cried Militor, advancing, his fist raised, toward Monsieur de Carmainges. "I am seventeen years old; do you hear me, monsieur?"

"And I — I am twenty-five," said Ernauton; "that is why I am going to chastise you as you deserve."

And seizing him by the collar and the belt, he raised him from the floor, and hurled him, as he would have done a package, through the window of the ground floor into the street, while Lardille screamed loud enough to make the walls crumble.

"Now," said Ernauton calmly, "step-father, step-mother, step-son, and every family on earth, I will make mince-meat of any one who bothers me again."

"Faith!" said Miradoux, "I think he is right, too. Why irritate the gentleman?"

"Ah! coward, coward; to let his son be beaten!" cried Lardille, advancing toward Eustache and pulling his few hairs.

"There, there, there," said Eustache; "peace; it is good for his disposition."

"Ah! tell me, do they throw men out of the window here?" said an officer, entering; "the devil! when one carries out this sort of a joke, one should at least shout: 'Look out, below there!'"

"Monsieur de Loignac!" cried twenty voices.

"Monsieur de Loignac!" repeated the Forty-Five.

And at this name known throughout Gascony, each one rose and stood silent.

CHAPTER IX.

MONSIEUR DE LOIGNAC.

Behind Monsieur de Loignac, Militor entered, bruised by his fall and crimson with anger.

"Your servant, gentlemen," said De Loignac; "we are making a great noise, it seems to me. . . . Ah! ah! Maître Militor has been ugly again, apparently, and his nose is suffering for it."

"I will pay you back," growled Militor, shaking his fist at Carmainges.

"Supper, Maître Fournichon," cried De Loignac, "and let every one be friends with his neighbor, if possible. From now on let us love one another like brothers."

"Humph!" said Saint Maline.

"Charity is rare," said Chalabre, spreading his napkin over his iron-gray doublet, so that whatever the quantity of the sauces, no accident might happen.

"And to love one another at such close range is difficult," added Ernauton; "it is true that we are not together for very long."

"See," cried Pincornay, who still had the raillery of Saint Maline at heart, "they make fun of me because I have no hat, and they say nothing to Monsieur de Montcrabeau, who is going to dine in a cuirass of the time of the Emperor Pertinax, from whom, in all probability, he is descended. That is what being on the defensive is."

Montcrabeau, growing warm, arose, and in a strained voice:

"Gentlemen," said he, "I will take it off; a suggestion to those who love better to see me with arms offensive, than with arms defensive."

And he majestically unlaced his cuirass, making a sign to his lackey, a great gray-haired fellow of fifty, to approach.

"Come, peace! peace!" said Monsieur de Loignac, "and let us take our places at table."

"Help me off with this cuirass, I beg you," said Pertinax to his lackey.

The big fellow took it in his hands.

"And I," said he, in a low tone, "am I not going to dine also? Hand me something, Pertinax; I am dying of hunger."

This remark, strangely familiar as it was, excited no surprise in him to whom it was addressed.

"I will do all I can," said he; "but to make sure, ask for yourself."

"Humph!" said the lackey in a sullen tone, "that is not very encouraging."

"Have you absolutely nothing left?" demanded Pertinax.

"We ate up our last crown at Sens."

"Well! See if you cannot make some money."

Scarcely had he finished speaking when they heard a cry in the street, and then on the threshold of the inn:

"Old iron to buy! Who wants to sell his sword and his old iron?" At this cry, Madame Fournichon ran to the door, while Fournichon majestically placed the first dishes on the table.

If one may judge from the way in which they were received, the cuisine of Fournichon must have been delicious.

Fournichon, unable to face all the compliments addressed to him, wanted to admit his wife to a share of them.

He looked for her, but in vain; she had disappeared. He called her.

"What can she be doing?" demanded he of a scullion, seeing that she did not come.

"Ah! maître, a golden bargain," replied the latter. "She is selling all your old iron for new silver."

"I hope she is not making way with my cuirass or my helmet!" cried Fournichon, rushing to the door.

"No, no," said De Loignac, "since the purchase of arms is forbidden by order of the King."

"Never mind," said Fournichon, and he ran to the door. Madame Fournichon returned triumphant.

"Well? What is the matter?" said she, seeing her husband thoroughly startled.

"They said you were selling my arms."

"Well?"

"Well; I do not want them sold."

"Bah! since we are at peace, two new saucepans are better than one old cuirass."

"However, buying old iron must be a pretty poor business, since the edict of the King was issued to which Monsieur de Loignac was just referring," said Chalabre.

"On the contrary, monsieur," said Dame Fournichon, "for

a long time this same merchant has been tempting me with his offers. Faith! to-day I could not resist him, and taking advantage of the opportunity, I made the most of it. Ten crowns, monsieur, are ten crowns, and an old cuirass is never anything but an old cuirass."

"What! ten crowns?" said Chalabre, "as much as that? The devil!" and he grew pensive.

"Ten crowns!" repeated Pertinax, casting an eloquent glance at his lackey; "do you hear, Monsieur Samuel?"

But Monsieur Samuel was no longer there.

"Ah!" said Monsieur de Loignac, "that merchant runs the risk of hanging, it seems to me."

"Oh! he is a brave man, very gentle and very accommodating," replied Madame Fournichon.

"But what does he do with all this iron?"

"He sells it again by weight."

"By weight?" said De Loignac; "and you say that he gave you ten crowns? For what?"

"For an old cuirass and an old sallet." [1]

"Supposing that together they weigh twenty pounds, that is half a crown a pound. *Parfandious!* as some one of my acquaintance says, herein lies a mystery!"

"If I could but catch this honest merchant in my château," said Chalabre, with shining eyes, "I would sell him three millions in weight of helmets, armlets, and cuirasses."

"What! you would sell the arms of your ancestors?" said Saint Maline, in an ironical tone.

"Ah! monsieur," said Eustache de Miradoux, "you would be doing wrong; those are sacred relics."

"Bah!" said Chalabre, "at the present time my ancestors are relics themselves, and need only masses."

The meal was growing animated, thanks to the Burgundy wine, the consumption of which was increased by Fournichon's spices. Voices rose to a higher pitch, dishes rattled, and brains were beginning to be filled with vapors, through which each Gascon saw everything rose-colored, — except Militor, who was thinking of his fall, and Carmainges, who was thinking of his page.

"Here are a lot of happy people," said De Loignac to his neighbor, who was Ernauton, "and they do not know why."

"Nor I either," replied Carmainges. "It is true that, as

[1] Kind of helmet. — *Tr.*

far as I am concerned, I am an exception and I am not in the least joyous."

"As far as you are concerned, you are wrong, monsieur," replied De Loignac; "for you are one of those for whom Paris is a gold mine, a paradise of honors, a world of happiness."

Ernauton shook his head.

"Well, we shall see!"

"Do not laugh at me, Monsieur de Loignac," said Ernauton, "you who appear to hold all the threads which make the most of us move, but at least do me the favor of not treating the Vicomte Ernauton of Carmainges like a puppet."

"I will do you still other favors in addition to that, Monsieur le Vicomte," said De Loignac, bowing politely; "I realized at first glance the difference between you and that other young man yonder; your eye is proud and gentle, while his glance is suspicious and sombre. What is his name?"

"Monsieur de Saint Maline. But the cause of this distinction, monsieur, if the question is not too inquisitive on my part?"

"I know you; that is all."

"Me," said Ernauton, surprised, "me? you know me?"

"You and him, and all the others who are here."

"That is strange."

"Yes; but it is necessary."

"Why is it necessary?"

"Because a leader must know his soldiers."

"And all these men" —

"Will be my soldiers to-morrow."

"But I thought that Monsieur d'Épernon" —

"Hush! Do not mention that name here, or rather mention no name at all here; open your ears and close your mouth, and since I have promised to do you every favor, take this advice in part payment."

"Thank you, monsieur," said Ernauton.

De Loignac wiped his mustache and rose.

"Gentlemen," said he, "since chance brings forty-five countrymen together here, let us drain a glass of this Spanish wine to the prosperity of each."

The suggestion caused unbounded applause.

"The most of them are drunk," said De Loignac to Ernauton; "it would be a good time to make each one relate his history, but time fails us."

Then raising his voice:

"Hello! Maître Fournichon," said he, "send all the women, children, and lackeys out of here."

Lardille rose, muttering; she had not finished her dessert.

Militor did not stir.

"Did you hear me, down there?" said De Loignac, with a glance which admitted of no reply. "Come, come! — into the kitchen, Monsieur Militor."

At the end of a few minutes there remained in the room only the forty-five guests and Monsieur de Loignac.

"Gentlemen," said the latter, "each one of you knows or at least surmises who has brought him to Paris. Well! well! do not shout out his name; you know it, that suffices. You know also that you have come in order to obey him."

A murmur of assent rose from all parts of the room; but, as each knew only the business which concerned himself, and was ignorant of the fact that his neighbor had come moved by the same power as himself, all looked at each other in astonishment.

"That is well," said De Loignac; "you will look at one another later, gentlemen. Rest assured you will have time to become acquainted. You have come, therefore. to obey this man. Do you acknowledge that?"

"Yes, yes!" cried the Forty-Five, "we acknowledge it."

"Well, to begin with," continued De Loignac, "you are to leave this inn without noise, and take possession of the lodgings which have been assigned to you."

"All of us?" demanded Saint Maline.

"All of you."

"We are all commanded, we are all equal here," continued Perducas, whose legs were so uncertain that, in order to maintain his centre of gravity, it was necessary to put his arm around Chalabre's neck.

"Take care there," said the latter, "you are touching my doublet."

"Yes, all equal," replied De Loignac, "bowing to the will of the master."

"Oh! oh, monsieur!" said Carmainges, growing red, "pardon, but I had not been told that Monsieur d'Épernon would call himself my master."

"Wait!"

"I did not understand it so."

"But wait a moment, stupid!"

There fell on most of the number the silence of curiosity, and on a few the silence of impatience.

"I have not yet told you who is to be your master, gentlemen."

"No," said Saint Maline, "but you said that we were to have one."

"Every one has a master!" cried De Loignac, "but if you are too proud to bow to the one we have just mentioned, look higher; not only do I not forbid you, but I command you."

"The King," murmured Carmainges.

"Silence!" said De Loignac, "you have come to obey; obey, then. In the meantime, here is an order which you will do me the kindness to read aloud, Monsieur Ernauton."

Ernauton slowly unfolded the parchment which Monsieur de Loignac held out to him, and read as follows:

"Order to Monsieur de Loignac to take command of the forty-five gentlemen whom I have summoned to Paris, with the consent of His Majesty.

"Nogaret de la Valette, Duc d'Epernon."

Drunk or sober, all bowed; there was no inequality except in the equilibrium when they tried to rise.

"So now that you have heard me," said Monsieur de Loignac, "it is imperative to follow me instantly. Your equipages and servants will remain here at Maître Fournichon's, who will take care of them. I will have them brought to you later; but for the present, make haste; the boats are waiting."

"The boats?" repeated all the Gascons; "we are to embark, then?"

And they exchanged looks full of interest.

"Without doubt," said De Loignac, "you are to embark. To reach the Louvre is it not necessary to cross the water?"

"To the Louvre! to the Louvre!" murmured the joyful Gascons. "*Cap de Bious!* We are going to the Louvre!"

De Loignac left the table, had the Forty-Five pass before him, counted them like sheep, and led them through the streets as far as the Tour de Nesle.

There they found three large barges, each of which took fifteen passengers on board and at once left the shore.

"What the devil are we to do at the Louvre?" thought the

boldest of the men, sobered by the cold air of the river, and for the most part very scantily covered.

"If only I had my cuirass!" murmured Pertinax de Montcrabeau.

CHAPTER X.

THE MAN OF THE CUIRASSES.

Pertinax had good cause to regret his absent cuirass, for at that very hour, through the mediation of the singular lackey whom we heard speak so familiarly to his master, he had parted with it forever.

In short, at those magic words "Ten crowns!" uttered by Madame Fournichon, the valet of Pertinax had run after the merchant.

As it was already night, and as, no doubt, the iron merchant was in haste, the latter had already gone thirty steps when Samuel started from the hotel.

Samuel was therefore obliged to call to the iron merchant.

The latter halted in fear, and threw a piercing glance at the man who was coming toward him; but seeing him laden with merchandise, he stopped.

"What do you want, my friend?" said he to him.

"By Heavens!" said the lackey, pleasantly. "What I want is to transact some business with you."

"Well! then let us do it quickly."

"You are in haste?"

"Yes."

"Oh! Kindly give me time to breathe. The devil!"

"Certainly; but breathe quickly; they are waiting for me."

It was evident that the merchant felt a certain mistrust of the lackey.

"When you have seen what I bring you," said the latter, "as you seem to me to be an amateur, you will take your time."

"What do you bring me?"

"A magnificent piece; a work of which — but you are not listening to me?"

"No, I am looking."

"Why?"

"You do not know, then, my friend," said the man of the cuirasses, "that the buying and selling of arms is forbidden by an edict of the King?"

And he cast anxious looks around. The lackey judged that it was best to appear ignorant.

"I know nothing," said he; "I have just arrived from Mont de Marsan."

"Ah! in that case it is different," said the man of the cuirasses, whom this reply seemed to reassure somewhat; "but although you have just come from Mont de Marsan," he continued, "you already know that I buy arms?"

"Yes; I know it."

"Who told you so?"

"Heavens! there was no need for any one to tell me, for you shouted it out loud enough just now."

"Where?"

"At the door of the inn of *The Sword of The Proud Chevalier.*"

"You were there, then?"

"Yes."

"With whom?"

"With a crowd of friends."

"With a crowd of friends? Usually there is no one at that inn."

"Then you must have found it greatly changed?"

"Exactly. But whence came all these friends?"

"From Gascony, like myself."

"Do you belong to the King of Navarre?"

"The idea! We are Frenchmen, body and soul."

"Yes, but Huguenots?"

"Catholics, like our Holy Father the Pope, thank God," said Samuel, doffing his cap; "but that is not the question. How about this cuirass?"

"Let us come a little closer to the walls, if you please; we are too much exposed in the open street."

They walked on a few steps, as far as a modest-looking house, at the windows of which no light was to be seen.

The door of the house was under a sort of portico which formed a balcony. A stone bench set off the façade, of which it was the sole ornament.

This bench was at once useful and agreeable, for it served as a block to the passers-by from which to mount their mules or their horses.

"MY! HOW HEAVY IT IS!" SAID SAMUEL.

"Let us see the cuirass," said the merchant, when they had come under the portico.

"Here it is."

"Wait; they are moving, I think, in the house."

"No, it is across the street."

The merchant turned.

In fact, opposite them was a two-story house the second floor of which was lighted up now and then.

"Let us decide quickly," said the merchant, feeling of the cuirass.

"My! how heavy it is!" said Samuel.

"Old, heavy, out of date."

"A work of art."

"Six crowns, if you like."

"What! six crowns! and just now you gave ten for an old broken-down corselet!"

"Six crowns, yes or no?" repeated the merchant.

"But consider the chasing!"

"To sell again as weight, of what use is the chasing?"

"Oh! oh! you haggle over it," said Samuel, "and just now you gave all they asked."

"I will give you one crown more," said the merchant impatiently.

"The gilding alone is worth fourteen crowns."

"Come," said the merchant, "let us end this quickly, or not at all."

"Good!" said Samuel, "you are a strange merchant; you hide in order to do business; you infringe against the edicts of the King, and haggle with honest people."

"Come! come! Don't shout like that!

"Oh! I am not afraid," said Samuel raising his voice; "I am not engaged in an illicit trade, and nothing forces me to hide."

"Come then, take ten crowns, and keep still."

"Ten crowns? I tell you that the gold alone is worth that; ah! you wish to run away?"

"No. What a madman you are!"

"Well! if you run away, let me tell you, I will call the guard!"

As he uttered these words, Samuel raised his voice so that his threat was virtually carried out. At the noise, a small window opened on the balcony of the house, against

which the transaction was taking place, and it was the squeaking this window made in opening which the terrified merchant had heard.

"Come, come," said he, "I see well enough that it must be as you wish; here are fifteen crowns; now be gone with you."

"Gladly," said Samuel, pocketing the fifteen crowns.

"That is good."

"But these fifteen crowns are for my master," went on Samuel, "and there is still something due me."

The merchant glanced about him, as he half drew his dagger from its sheath. Evidently he had intended to rend Samuel's skin so that he would be saved from ever again buying a cuirass to take the place of the one he had just sold; but Samuel had an eye as sharp as a sparrow gathering crumbs, and he stepped back, saying:

"Yes, yes, good merchant, I see your dagger; but I also see something else — the figure on that balcony who is watching you."

The merchant, white with fright, looked in the direction indicated by Samuel, and saw on the balcony a tall, fantastic-looking creature, enveloped in a dressing-gown trimmed with cat fur; this argus had lost neither a syllable nor a gesture of the last scene.

"Come, come, you manage to get what you want from me," said the merchant, with a laugh like that of a hyena when it shows its teeth, "there is one more crown, and may the devil strangle you!" he added in a low tone.

"Thanks," said Samuel, "good luck to you!"

And bowing to the man of the cuirasses, he disappeared with a sneer.

The merchant, left alone in the street, began to gather up the cuirass of Pertinax and to insert it into that of Fournichon.

The bourgeois still watched him; then when he saw the merchant well laden:

"It appears, monsieur," said he to him, "that you buy armor?"

"Oh, no, monsieur," replied the unfortunate merchant, "it was merely by chance and because the opportunity offered itself."

"Well, the chance suits me wonderfully well."

"In what respect, monsieur?" demanded the merchant.

"Well! I actually have, within reach, a pile of old iron which is in my way."

"I do not doubt it; but just now, as you see, I have all that I can carry."

"I will show it to you."

"It is useless; I have no more money."

"You need not mind that, I will give you credit; you look like a perfectly honest man."

"Thanks, but my friends are waiting for me."

"It is strange, but it seems to me that I know you!" said the bourgeois.

"Me?" said the merchant, striving in vain to repress a shudder.

"Look at this helmet," said the bourgeois, pushing forward the object referred to with his long foot, for he was unwilling to leave the window, fearing lest the merchant should steal away. He placed the helmet in the hand of the merchant.

"You know me," said the latter, "that is to say, you think you know me?"

"That is to say I know you. Are you not" —

The bourgeois seemed to consider; the merchant remained motionless, waiting.

"Are you not Nicholas?"

The face of the merchant changed, the helmet trembled in his hand.

"Nicholas?" he repeated.

"Nicholas Truchov, iron merchant, Rue de la Cossonnerie."

"No, no," replied the merchant, who smiled and breathed again, like a man four times happy.

"No matter, you have a good face, and I want you to buy my complete set of armor, cuirass, armlets, and sword."

"Remember that it is forbidden commerce, monsieur."

"I know that; your man shouted it out loud enough to you just now."

"You overheard?"

"Perfectly; you were even generous in the affair; that is what gave me the idea of dealing with you; but do not fear, I shall not take advantage of you. I know what business is; I have been a merchant myself."

"Ah! and what did you sell?"

"What did I sell? Favors."

"A good business, monsieur."

"Therefore I made my fortune in it, and you find me a bourgeois."

"I congratulate you."

"As a result, I like my ease, and I want to sell all my old iron because it is in my way."

"I understand that."

"There are cuirasses there also. Ah! and then the gloves."

"But I have no need of all those."

"Nor I."

"I will take only the cuirass."

"You buy nothing but cuirasses, then?"

"No."

"That is queer, for you buy in order to sell by weight; you said so, at least, and iron is iron."

"That is true, but you see, by preference"—

"As you please; buy the cuirass, or rather, you are right; go, buy nothing at all."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that in times like these every one has need of arms."

"What! in times of peace?"

"My dear friend, if we were at peace, there would not be such buying and selling of cuirasses, *ventre de biche!* such things must not be said to me."

"Monsieur!"

"And especially in secret."

The merchant started to go.

"But, in truth, the more I look at you," said the bourgeois, "the more certain I am that I know you; so you are not Nicholas Truchov, but I know you just the same."

Silence.

"And if you buy cuirasses"—

"Well?"

"Well, I am sure that it is in order to accomplish a work acceptable to God."

"Hold your tongue!"

"You enchant me," said the bourgeois, stretching over the balcony a long arm, the hand of which took hold of the hand of the merchant.

"But who the devil are you?" demanded the latter, feeling his hand held as in a vise.

"I am Robert Briquet, surnamed the Terror of Schism, a

friend of the Union and a fierce Catholic; now I am positive I recognize you."

The merchant became white.

"You are Nicholas — Grimbelot, currier of cow hides."

"No, you are mistaken. Adieu, Maître Robert Briquet; delighted to have made your acquaintance."

And the merchant turned away from the balcony.

"What! you are going?"

"You can easily see."

"Without taking my old iron?"

"I have no money with me, I tell you."

"My valet can follow you."

"Impossible."

"Well, what is to be done?"

"Why! stay as we are."

"*Ventre de biche!* I will see that we do not. I have too great a desire to cultivate your acquaintance."

"And I to avoid yours," replied the merchant, who, this time, having made up his mind to abandon his cuirasses and lose all rather than be recognized, took to his heels and fled.

But Maître Robert Briquet was not the man to let himself be outwitted thus; he stepped over his balcony, reached the street without the need even of jumping, and in five or six strides overtook the merchant.

"Are you mad, my friend?" said he, laying his great hand on the poor fellow's shoulder. "If I were your enemy, if I wished to arrest you, I would have but to cry out, for the guard passes at this hour through the Rue des Augustins; but no, you are my friend, or the devil take me, and the proof of this is that now I positively recall your name."

This time the merchant began to laugh.

Robert Briquet placed himself opposite to him.

"Your name is Nicholas Poulain," said he; "you are lieutenant of the provostship of Paris. I was sure that there was a Nicholas to it."

"I am lost!" murmured the merchant.

"On the contrary, you are saved; *ventre de biche!* you will never do for the good cause what I have the intention of doing."

Nicholas Poulain gave a groan.

"Come, come, courage," said Robert Briquet; "reassure yourself. You have found a brother — Brother Briquet; take a cui

rass, I will take two others; I will make you a present of my armlets, of my cuirasses, and of my gloves into the bargain; come on, and long live the Union!"

"You are going with me?"

"I will help you carry away the arms which ought to conquer the Philistines; show me the way and I will follow."

Very naturally there was an instant's suspicion in the soul of the unfortunate lieutenant of the provostship, but it vanished almost as soon as it came.

"If he wanted to undo me," he murmured to himself, "would he have acknowledged that he knew me?"

Then aloud:

"Well, since you really wish it, come with me," said he.

"To life or death!" cried Robert Briquet, pressing with one hand the hand of his ally, while he raised in the air the other with its burden of old iron.

The two set out.

After walking for twenty minutes Nicholas Poulain reached the Marais; he was dripping with perspiration, as much from the rapidity of the walk as from the warmth of their political conversation.

"What a recruit I have raised!" he murmured, stopping a short distance from the Hôtel de Guise.

"I feared that my armor was coming in this direction," thought Briquet.

"Friend," said Nicholas Poulain, turning with a tragic gesture to Briquet, who looked the picture of innocence, "before entering the lion's den, I will allow you a last minute for reflection; there is time for you to withdraw if you are not over-scrupulous of conscience."

"Bah!" said Briquet, "I have seen many another den, *et non intremuit medulla mea*," he declaimed. "Ah! pardon; you do not know Latin, perhaps?"

"But you do."

"As you see."

"Learned, bold, vigorous, rich; what a find!" said Poulain to himself; "well, let us enter."

And he led Briquet to the gigantic door of the Hôtel de Guise, which opened at the third blow of the bronze knocker.

The court was filled with guards and men, enveloped in cloaks, and walking about like phantoms.

There was not a single light in the hotel.

Eight horses, saddled and bridled, were waiting in one corner. The noise of the knocker made most of the men turn, and they formed a sort of hedge about the newcomers.

Then Nicholas Poulain, bending down to the ear of a janitor who held the door half open, gave him his name.

"And I bring a good companion," he added.

"Pass in, gentlemen," said the janitor.

"Take this to the storehouse," said Poulain, handing to a guard the three cuirasses, and the old iron of Robert Briquet.

"Good! there is a storehouse," said the latter to himself; "better and better. Plague it, what an organizer you are, Maître Provost!"

"Yes, yes, we have judgment," replied Poulain, smiling proudly; "but come and let me introduce you."

"Take care," said the bourgeois; "I am excessively timid. All that I desire is that they tolerate me; when I shall have given proofs of my capacity, I will present myself, as the Greek says, by my deeds alone."

"As you please," replied the lieutenant of the provostship; "wait for me here."

And he went forward to shake hands with most of those who were walking about.

"What are we waiting for?" asked a voice.

"The master," replied another voice.

At that moment a tall man entered the hotel; he had heard the last word exchanged between the mysterious figures.

"Gentlemen," said he, "I come in his name."

"Ah! it is Monsieur de Mayneville!" cried Poulain.

"Lo! here I am in a country of friends," said Briquet to himself, assuming a grimace which completely disfigured him.

"Gentlemen, here is our full number; let us deliberate;" said the voice which had first made itself heard.

"Ah! good!" said Briquet, "and this is my procurator, Maître Marteau."

And he changed the grimace with a facility which proved how familiar studies in physiognomy were to him.

"Let us go up, gentlemen," said Poulain.

Monsieur de Mayneville passed first; Nicholas Poulain followed; the men in cloaks came next, and after them Robert Briquet.

All ascended the steps of an outside stairway that led to a vault.

Robert Briquet followed the others, murmuring:

"But the page — where is that devil of a page?"

CHAPTER XI.

THE LEAGUE AGAIN.

As Robert Briquet, assuming the air of a conspirator, mounted the stairs behind the others, he saw that Nicholas Poulain, having spoken to several of his mysterious colleagues, was waiting at the door of the vault.

"It must be for me," said Briquet to himself.

In fact, the lieutenant of the provostship stopped his new friend at the very moment when he was about to cross the formidable threshold.

"You will bear me no ill-will," said he; "but most of our friends do not know you, and desire to have some information concerning you before admitting you to the council."

"That is all right," replied Briquet, "you know that my natural modesty had already foreseen this objection."

"I do you justice," replied Poulain, "you are a clever man."

"I will retire, then," went on Briquet, "delighted in one evening to have seen so many brave defenders of the Catholic Union."

"Do you wish me to take you back?" said Poulain.

"No, thank you, you need not trouble."

"You may meet with difficulties at the door; on the other hand, they are waiting for me."

"Have you not a password to use in going out? I shall not admit that I know you, Maître Nicholas; it would not be prudent."

"We have one."

"Well, give it to me."

"Since you have entered" —

"And since we are friends."

"So be it; you have but to say, *Parma* and *Lorraine*."

"And the porter will open the door for me?"

"Instantly."

"Very well, thank you. Go back to your business; I shall return to mine."

Nicholas Poulain left his companion and returned to his colleagues. Briquet started as though he were going down the stairs to the court, but at the first step he paused to explore the locality. The result of his observations showed him that the vault ran parallel with the outside wall, which it sheltered by a wide shed. It was evident that this vault led to a lower room, suited to the mysterious reunion to which Briquet had not had the honor of being admitted.

What confirmed him in this supposition, which soon become a certainty, was the fact that he saw a light appear at a grated window. This window, which was pierced in the wall, was protected by a kind of wooden funnel, such as is to-day used on the windows of prisons or convents, to intercept the view from the outside and to admit only air and light.

Briquet was right in thinking that the window looked into the meeting-place, and that if it could be reached the position would be favorable for observation, and that from there the eye could easily supply the other senses.

The only difficulty was to reach this observatory, and to secure a position from which to see without being seen.

Briquet looked about him.

In the court were the pages with their horses, the soldiers with their halberds, and the porter with his key; in short, all alert and far-sighted people.

Fortunately the court was very large and the night very dark. Moreover, pages and soldiers, having seen those devoted to the house disappear under the vault, concerned themselves with nothing more, and the porter, knowing the doors were securely fastened, and realizing the impossibility of any one's leaving without the password, troubled himself no further except to prepare his bed for the night and look after a fine jug of spiced wine which was getting warm before the fire.

There are in curiosity incentives as strong as in the outbreak of any passion. This desire to know is so great that it has consumed the life of more than one inquisitive person.

Briquet had been too well informed so far not to desire to complete his information. He gave a second glance around him, and, fascinated by the light which the window threw upon the bars of iron, he thought he saw in that reflec-

tion the sign of a challenge, and in those shining bars some provocation for his robust fists.

Consequently, determined to reach the funnel, he glided along the cornice, which led from the steps to the window, and followed the wall as a cat might have done, or a monkey, holding on by his hands and feet to the sculptured ornaments of the wall itself.

If the pages and the soldiers had been able to distinguish, in the darkness, this fantastic silhouette gliding along the middle of the wall without apparent support, they certainly would not have failed to cry out "magic," and more than one among the bravest of them would have felt his hair stand on end.

But Robert Briquet did not give them time to see his witchcraft. In four strides he reached the bars, grasped them, and crouched between them and the funnel, in such a way that from without he could not be seen, and from within he was almost hidden by the grating.

Briquet was not mistaken, and when finally there, was amply rewarded for his pains and audacity.

His eye embraced a great room lighted by an iron lamp with four burners, and filled with armor of every sort, among which, by looking closely, he would no doubt have been able to recognize his armlets and his gorget.

The quantity of pikes, swords, halberds, and muskets, ranged in piles or bundles, would have sufficed to arm four good regiments.

Briquet, however, paid less attention to the superb arrangement of these arms than to the assembly engaged in putting them to use, or in distributing them. His glowing eyes pierced the window coated with a thick covering of smoke and dust, to guess the faces of acquaintances beneath the visors or hoods.

"Oh! oh! there is Maître Crucé, our revolutionary friend; there is our little Brigard, the grocer at the corner of the Rue des Lombards; there is Maître Leclerc, who calls himself Bussy, and who certainly would not have dared to commit such a sacrilege during the years when the real Bussy was living. I must some day ask this old fencing-master if he knows the secret box in which a certain David of my acquaintance died at Lyons. Plague it! the bourgeoise is fully represented, but the nobility — Ah! Monsieur de Mayneville

— God forgive me ! — is shaking hands with Nicholas Poulain ; it is touching, they fraternize so. Ah ! ah ! this Monsieur de Mayneville is the orator, then ? He is posing, it seems to me, in order to make an address ; he has pleasant gestures and uses his eyes persuasively."

As a matter of fact, Monsieur de Mayneville had begun a discourse.

Robert Briquet shook his head while Monsieur de Mayneville was speaking ; not that he could hear a single word of the speech, but he interpreted his gestures and those of the assembly.

" He scarcely seems to convince his audience : Crucé makes a face at him, Lachappelle Marteau turns his back on him, and Bussy Leclerc shrugs his shoulders.

" Come, come, Monsieur de Mayneville, speak, perspire, get out of breath, be eloquent, *ventre de biche !* Oh, good ! There are some in the audience who are growing interested. Oh ! oh ! they crowd together, they shake hands, they throw their caps in the air ; the devil ! "

Briquet, as we have said, was able to see, but could not hear ; but we, who are present in spirit at the deliberations of the stormy gathering, will tell our readers what had just taken place there.

In the first place, Crucé, Marteau, and Bussy had complained to Monsieur de Mayneville of the inaction of the Duke de Guise.

Marteau, in his capacity of procurator, had addressed the meeting.

" Monsieur de Mayneville," he had said, " you come on the part of Duc Henri de Guise ? Thank you. We accept you as ambassador ; but the presence of the duke himself is indispensable to us. After the death of his glorious father, he, at the age of eighteen, made all good Frenchmen adopt the project of the Union and enrolled us all under this banner. According to our oath, we have exposed our persons and sacrificed our fortunes for the triumph of this holy cause ; and that is why, in spite of our sacrifices, nothing progresses, nothing is decided on. Take care, Monsieur de Mayneville, the Parisians will become tired ; and, Paris once tired, what will they do in France ? Monsieur le Duc would best think of this."

This exordium won the approval of all the Leaguers, and

Nicholas Poulain, especially, distinguished himself by his zeal in applauding. Monsieur de Mayneville replied in simple words :

" Gentlemen, if nothing is decided on, it is because nothing is yet ready. Examine the situation, I beg you. Monsieur le Duc and his friend Monsieur le Cardinal are at Nancy observing; one is putting on its feet an army meant to restrain the Huguenots of Flanders, whom Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou wishes to send to take possession of us; the other is despatching courier after courier to all the clergy in France, and to the Pope, urging them to adopt the Union. Monsieur le Duc de Guise knows what you do not know, gentlemen; namely, that this ancient alliance, unfortunately broken, between the Duc d'Anjou and Le Béarnais, is ready to be renewed. There is a question of occupying Spain from the side of Navarre, and of preventing them from sending us arms and money. But, before doing anything, and especially before coming to Paris, Monsieur le Duc wishes to be in a condition to fight against heresy and usurpation. But, in default of Monsieur de Guise, we have Monsieur de Mayenne, who, besides being general, is councillor, and whom I am expecting any moment.

" That means," interrupted Bussy, and it was at this point that he shrugged his shoulders; " that means that your princes are everywhere where we are not, and never where we want them to be. What is Madame de Montpensier doing, for instance."

" Monsieur, Madame de Montpensier entered Paris this morning."

" And no one saw her ? "

" Yes, monsieur."

" Who ? "

" Salcède."

" Oh ! oh ! " cried all the assembly.

" But," said Crucé, " she made herself invisible, then ? "

" Not entirely, but unapproachable, I trust."

" And how do they know that she is here ? " demanded Nicholas Poulain. " I presume it was not Salcède who told you."

" I know that she is here," replied Mayneville, " because I accompanied her as far as the Porte Saint Antoine."

" I heard that they closed the gates," interrupted Marteau, who longed for an opportunity to make a second speech.

"Yes, monsieur," replied Mayneville with his never failing courtesy, which no attack could make him forget.

"How did she have them opened then?"

"In her own way."

"And she has the power to open the gates of Paris?" said the Leaguers, jealous, and suspicious as the bourgeoise always are when allied with the nobility.

"Gentlemen," said Mayneville, "there happened this morning, at the gates of Paris, a thing which you seem to be ignorant of, or at least to realize but vaguely. The order had been given to let only those who were bearers of a card of admission enter the gates."

"By whom were the cards signed?"

"I do not know. But in front of us, at the Porte Saint Antoine, five or six men arrived, four of whom were very shabbily dressed and of very poor appearance; they were bearers of the necessary cards, and passed in before our eyes. Some of them acted with the insolent buffoonery of men who think themselves in a conquered country. Who are these men? What are these cards? Answer, gentlemen of Paris, you whose duty it is to be ignorant of nothing concerning the affairs of our city."

Thus Mayneville from the accused became the accuser, which is the highest art of oratory.

"Cards! Insolent men! Exceptional admissions to the gates of Paris! Oh! oh! What does that mean?" demanded Nicholas Poulain, dreamily.

"If you do not know these things, you who live here, how should we know them, we, who live in Lorraine, spending all our time running along the roads to bring together the two ends of this circle called the Union?"

"And how did these men come?"

"Some on foot, others on horseback; some alone, others with lackeys."

"Are they followers of the King?"

"Three or four looked like beggars."

"Are they warriors?"

"There were only two swordsmen among the six."

"Are they strangers?"

"I think they are Gascons."

"Oh!" cried some voices in a tone of scorn.

"Never mind," said Bussy; "were they Turks they should

arouse our interest. We will find out about them. Monsieur Poulain, this is your business. But all this tells us nothing of the affairs of the League."

"There is a new plan," replied Monsieur de Mayneville. "You will know to-morrow that Salcède, who had already betrayed us, and who would have betrayed us again, not only did not speak, but even retracted on the scaffold. This is due to the duchess, who, entering in the suite of one of the card-bearers, had the courage to penetrate as far as the scaffold at the risk of being crushed a thousand times, and to make herself seen by the victim at the risk of being recognized. It was at this moment that Salcède paused in his effusion; an instant later our brave hangman stopped him in his repentance. So, gentlemen, you have nothing to fear from our enterprises in Flanders. This terrible secret has been rolled into a tomb."

It was this last phrase which brought the Leaguers around Monsieur de Mayneville.

Briquet guessed their joy from their gestures. Their joy greatly troubled the worthy bourgeois, who seemed to make a sudden resolution.

He let himself slip from the funnel to the pavement of the court, and started toward the door, where, on his pronouncing the two words *Parma* and *Lorraine*, the porter gave him free exit.

Once in the street, Maître Robert Briquet drew in such a long draught of air that it was easy to understand he had held his breath some time.

The council still continued. History tells us what occurred there. Monsieur de Mayneville brought from the Guises to the future insurgents of Paris the whole plan of insurrection.

It consisted in a scheme to murder the important personages of the city known to be held in favor by the King, to run through the streets, crying: "Long live the Mass! Death to the politicians!" and so to kindle a new Saint Bartholomew from the ashes of the old; only, in this one, they were to confound the wrong-thinking Catholics with all kinds of Huguenots. In acting thus, they would be serving two Gods: the one who reigned in heaven, and the one who was to reign over France — the Eternal, and Monsieur de Guise.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CHAMBER OF HIS MAJESTY HENRY III. AT THE LOUVRE.

In that great chamber of the Louvre, which before now our readers have so often entered with us, and in which we have seen poor King Henry III. spend so many long and cruel hours, we are about to find him once more, no longer King, no longer master, but filled with despondency; pale, anxious, and given up without reserve to the persecution of all the shadows which his memory incessantly evoked under those illustrious arches.

Henry was greatly changed since the fatal death of his friends, an account of which we have given elsewhere; this grief had passed over his head like a devastating hurricane, and the poor King, who, remembering constantly that he was a man, had placed his strength and his confidence only in private affections, had seen himself robbed by jealous death of all confidence and all strength, anticipating thus the terrible moment when kings see God alone, — without friends, without a guard, and without a crown.

Henry III. had been cruelly tried: every one he loved had successively fallen around him. After Schomberg, Quélus, and Maugiron, killed in duels by Livarot and Antraguet, Saint Mégrin had been assassinated by Monsieur de Mayenne; these wounds were still fresh and bleeding. The affection he had for his two favorites, D'Épernon and Joyeuse, resembled that which a father who has lost his best loved children gives to those who are left him; while thoroughly realizing the faults of the latter, he loves them, he cares for them; he guards them in order to give death no hold over them. Henry had heaped riches on D'Épernon, yet he loved D'Épernon only by fits and starts; at certain times he even hated him. It was then that Catharine, that pitiless counsellor, in whom thought, like the lamp in a tabernacle, was always awake, — it was then that Catharine, incapable of follies, even in her youth, assumed the voice of the people, to find fault with the affections of the King.

When he emptied the treasury in order to convert the estate of La Valette into a duchy, and to aggrandize it royally, she did not say to him:

"Sire, hate these men who do not love you, or what is much worse, who love you only for themselves."

But if she saw the brow of the King wrinkle, if, in a moment of weariness, she heard him accuse D'Épernon of avarice or cowardice, she at once found the inevitable word that summed up all the griefs of the people and of the royalty against D'Épernon, and which made a new furrow in the royal hatred.

D'Épernon, only partly Gascon, had, with his cleverness and his native perversity, taken the measure of the royal weakness; he knew how to conceal his ambition, a vague ambition, the aim of which was still unknown to himself; but his covetousness took the place of a compass in directing him toward the distant and unknown world which, as yet, the future hid from him, and it was by this covetousness alone that he governed himself. If the treasury chanced to be somewhat full, D'Épernon was seen to rise and draw near, his arms rounded, his face smiling; if the treasury were empty, he disappeared, his lips scornful, his brow frowning, to shut himself up, either in his hotel or in one of his châteaux, where he cried misery, until he laid hold of the King in his weakness of heart, and drew from him some new gift.

In him favoritism had grown into a trade, a trade of which he skilfully exploited all possible revenue. At first he did not overlook in the King the least delay in payments when due; then, when later he became a courtier, and when the capricious winds of the royal favor were sufficient by frequent revenue to solidify his Gascon brains, later, we say, he consented to take upon himself a part of the work, that is, to coöperate in the receipt of the funds which he wished to make his booty.

This necessity, he well knew, was causing him to become, instead of an idle courtier, which is the best of all conditions, an active courtier, which is the worst. He very bitterly deplored the peaceful leisure of Quélus, Schomberg, and Maugiron, who in their life had not spoken of public or private affairs, and who so easily had converted favor into money, and money into pleasures; but times had changed; the iron age had succeeded the golden age; money did not come as it once did; one had to go to money, and in order to get it, dig down into the veins of the people, as in a half used-up mine. D'Épernon became resigned, and hurled himself greedily into the inextricable bramble-bushes of administration, devastating here and there along his pathway, and pressing

out money without keeping account of the curses, each time that the rattle of the gold crowns covered the voices of the complainants. The rapid and very incomplete sketch which we have traced of the character of Joyeuse may show the reader what a difference there was between the two favorites who shared, we will not say the friendship, but that large portion of influence which Henry always let those who surrounded him wield over France and himself. Joyeuse, very naturally and unconsciously, had followed the steps and adopted the tradition of Quélus, Schomberg, Maugiron, and Saint Megrin; he loved the King and unconcernedly let himself be loved by him; only all the strange rumors which had gone abroad concerning the marvellous friendship which the King had for the predecessors of Joyeuse had died with the friendship; no infamous blot soiled the almost paternal affection of Henry for Joyeuse. Belonging to a family of illustrious and honest men, Joyeuse had, at least in public, the respect of royalty, and his familiarity never passed certain bounds.

In the question of morals, Joyeuse was a real friend to Henry; but this question seldom arose. Anne was young, enthusiastic, in love, and when in love, egotistical; it was little for him to be happy through the King and to turn back the happiness to its source; it was everything for him to be happy in any way whatsoever. Brave, beautiful, rich, he shone with the triple reflection which crowns youthful brows with an aureole of love. Nature had done too much for Joyeuse, and Henry sometimes cursed nature, who had left him, a King, so little to do for his friend.

Henry thoroughly understood these two men, and loved them, no doubt, on account of the contrast. Beneath his sceptical and superstitious exterior, he hid a fund of philosophy which, without Catharine, might have developed in a remarkably useful way.

Often betrayed, Henry was never deceived.

It was therefore with this perfect understanding of the character of his friends, with this profound knowledge of their good and bad qualities, that, far from them, isolated, and in his gloomy chamber, he thought of them, of himself, of his life, and saw in shadow the funereal horizons, already outlined in the future, but not visible to many eyes less far-seeing than his own.

The affair of Salcède had greatly saddened him. Alone, between two women, at such a moment, Henry felt his absolute loneliness; the weakness of Louise grieved him; the strength of Catharine frightened him. In fact, he felt in himself that vague and eternal terror which those kings experience who are branded by fate as men through whom or with whom a race is to become extinct. To realize, in short, that, although raised above such men, this greatness has no solid foundation, to feel that you are the statue before which incense is burned, the idol which is adored, but that priests and people, worshippers and minister, bow before you or rise according to their interest, and oscillate according to their caprice, is, to a haughty spirit, the most cruel disgrace. Henry felt this, and the feeling irritated him.

And yet, from time to time, he recovered the energy of his youth, extinguished in him long before the close of that youth.

"After all," said he to himself, "why fret? I have no more wars to carry on; De Guise is at Nancy, Henry at Pau; the one is obliged to hide his ambition within himself, the other has never had any. The people are quiet, no Frenchman has seriously considered this impossible enterprise of dethroning his King; the third crown promised by the golden scissors of Madame de Montpensier is only the idle talk of a woman wounded in her pride; my mother alone is always dreaming of her phantom of usurpation, without actually being able to show me the usurper. But I, who am a man, I, who in spite of my griefs, still have a young brain, I know how much to rely on the pretenders she fears. I will make Henry of Navarre ridiculous, De Guise odious, and, sword in hand, I will scatter the foreign Leagues. By Heaven! I was not worth more at Jarnac and Moncontour than I am to-day.

"Yes," continued Henry, letting his head fall forward again on his breast; "yes, but in the meantime, I am weary, and it is death to be weary. Ah! therein lies my one real conspirator, weariness! and my mother never speaks to me of this. We shall see if any one comes to me this evening! Joyeuse made such promises to be here early; he amuses himself, but what in the devil does he do in order to amuse himself? D'Épernon? Ah! he does not amuse himself, he sulks; he has not yet attended to his bill of twenty-five thousand crowns now due; well, in faith! he may sulk as much as he pleases."

"Sire," said the voice of the usher, "Monsieur le Duc d'Épernon!"

All those who know the weariness of waiting, the feeling of injury that it engenders in regard to those expected, and the facility with which it dissipates the clouds of worry when the person appears, will comprehend the alacrity of the King in ordering a chair to be brought for the duke.

"Ah! good evening, duke," said he; "I am delighted to see you."

D'Épernon bowed respectfully.

"Why did you not come to see that wretch of a Spaniard quartered? You well knew there was room for you in my box, because I told you so."

"Sire, I was unable to come."

"You were unable?"

"I had business, sire."

"One would say, in truth, that you were my minister, with a face a yard long, and that you had come to tell me that a subsidy had not been paid," said Henry, shrugging his shoulders.

"Faith, sire," said D'Épernon, catching the ball in its bound, "your Majesty is right; the subsidy has not been paid, and I am without a crown."

"Good!" said Henry impatiently.

"But," went on D'Épernon, "it is not a question of that, and I hasten to tell your Majesty so, lest you think that such was the business that occupied me."

"Let us hear about this business, duke."

"Your Majesty knows what took place at the execution of Salcède?"

"I should think so! as I was there."

"There was an attempt made to carry off the condemned man."

"I did not see that."

"Nevertheless, such is the rumor about the city."

"A rumor without cause and without result; they did not move."

"I think your Majesty is mistaken."

"And on what do you base your belief?"

"On the fact that Salcède contradicted before the people what he had said before the judges."

"Ah! you already know that, do you?"

"I try to know all that interests your Majesty."

"Thank you; but what are you driving at with this preamble?"

"At this: a man who dies like Salcède dies a good servant, sire."

"Well! what next?"

"The master who has such servants is very fortunate; that is all."

"And you mean that I have no such servants, or rather that I no longer have them? You are right, if that is what you mean."

"That is not what I mean. Your Majesty would find, on occasion, — and I can answer for it better than any one, — servants as faithful as the master of Salcède found in him."

"The master of Salcède! The master of Salcède! For once call things by their name, all you who are around me. What is this master's name?"

"Your Majesty ought to know it better than I; you who take part in politics."

"I know what I know. Tell me what you know."

"I? I know nothing. I merely suspect many things."

"Ah!" said Henry wearied, "you come here to frighten me, and to say disagreeable things to me, do you not? Thank you, duke, I am very grateful to you for that."

"Come, now, your Majesty is unkind to me," said D'Épernon.

"I am just, though, I believe."

"No, sire. The warning of a devoted man may come to naught; but, none the less, this man has done his duty in giving the warning."

"This is my affair."

"Ah! since your Majesty takes it in that way, you are right, sire; therefore let us say no more about it."

There was silence which the King was first to break.

"Come," said he, "do not make me gloomy, duke. I am already as dismal as an Egyptian Pharaoh in his pyramid. Cheer me up."

"Ah, sire, joy cannot be commanded!"

The King struck the table angrily with his fist.

"You are an obstinate, bad friend, duke!" he cried. "Alas! alas! I did not think to lose all in losing my former subjects."

"Might I venture to remark to your Majesty that you scarcely encourage the new ones?"

Here the King made another pause, during which, for all reply, he looked with a most significant expression at the man whose fortune he had made. D'Épernon understood.

"Your Majesty reproaches me with your kindnesses," said he, in the tone of a thorough Gascon. "I do not reproach him with my devotion."

And the duke, who had not yet seated himself, took the chair which the King had had brought for him.

"La Valette, La Valette," said Henry, sadly, "you break my heart, you who have so much spirit, you who could by your good humor make me so gay and happy! God is witness that I have not thought of my brave Quélus, or Schomberg, so good, or Maugiron, so solicitous as to my honor. No, there was in those days Bussy; Bussy, who did not belong to me, to be sure, but whom I should have won had I not been afraid of giving umbrage to others; Bussy, who, alas! was the involuntary cause of their death! To what have I come that I regret even my enemies? Surely, all four were brave men. Ah, my God! do not be angry at what I am saying. What do you want, La Valette? It is not your way to give great thrusts of the rapier to every comer each hour of the day; but, dear friend, if you are not adventurous and clever, you are witty, ingenious, and occasionally you offer good counsel. You know all my affairs, like that other more humble friend with whom I never felt a single moment of weariness."

"Of whom is your Majesty pleased to speak?" asked the duke.

"You ought to resemble him, D'Épernon."

"But it is necessary for me to know whom your Majesty regrets."

"Oh! poor Chicot, where are you?"

D'Épernon rose, thoroughly piqued.

"Well! what are you going to do?" said the King.

"It seems, sire, that your Majesty is reminiscent to-day; but, in truth, that is not pleasant for every one."

"And why not?"

"Because your Majesty, without intending it, perhaps, compares me to Maître Chicot, and because I feel myself very little flattered by the comparison."

"You are wrong, D'Épernon. I can compare to Chicot only a man whom I love and who loves me. He was a true and clever servant."

And Henry heaved a deep sigh.

"It was not in order to resemble Maître Chicot, I presume, that your Majesty made me a duke and a peer?" said D'Épernon.

"Come, let us not recriminate," said the King, with so malicious a smile that the Gascon, shrewd and impudent as he was, found himself more ill at ease before this mild sarcasm than he would have been before a flagrant reproach.

"Chicot loved me," continued Henry, "and I miss him; that is all I can say. Oh! when I think that all those handsome, brave, and faithful young men have been in this very room; that over there on the armchair on which you have placed your hat, Chicot has slept more than a hundred times!"

"Perhaps he was very witty," interrupted D'Épernon; "but, at all events, he was not very respectful."

"Alas!" went on Henry, "this dear friend has now no more mind than body."

And he sadly shook his chaplet of death's heads, which made as doleful a jingle as though it had been made of real bones.

"Ah! what has become of your Chicot?" asked D'Épernon, carelessly.

"He is dead," replied Henry; "dead, like all who have loved me."

"Well, sire," resumed the duke, "I think, in truth, that he did well to die; he was growing old, much less so, however, than his jokes, and I have been told that sobriety was not his favorite virtue. Of what did the poor devil die, sire? — of indigestion?"

"Chicot died of grief, you hard heart," sharply replied the King.

"He said so to make you laugh a last time."

"That is where you are mistaken; he did not even want to sadden me by the announcement of his illness. He knew how I regretted my friends; he who so many times had seen me weep for them."

"Then it was his shadow which returned to announce his death?"

"Would to God that I might see him, even in shadow! No,

it was his friend, the worthy Prior Gorenflot, who wrote me the sad news."

"Gorenflot! who is he?"

"A holy man whom I made prior of the Jacobins, and who lives in the beautiful convent outside the Porte Saint Antoine, opposite the Faubin Cross, near Bel Esbat."

"That is good! Some poor preacher to whom your Majesty has given a priory of thirty thousand pounds with which you are careful not to reproach him."

"Are you becoming impious now?"

"If that would make your Majesty less weary I should try."

"Will you keep still, duke; you offend God!"

"Chicot was very impious, yet it seems to me that he was pardoned."

"Chicot came at a time when I could still laugh at something."

"Then your Majesty does wrong to regret him."

"And why?"

"If you can no longer laugh at anything, Chicot, gay as he was, would not be of much use to you."

"The man was good at everything, and it is not merely because of his spirits that I regret him."

"Because of what, then? Not on account of his face, I presume, for he was very homely, Maître Chicot."

"He gave good counsel."

"Well! I see that if he were living your Majesty would make him Keeper of the Seals, as you made a prior of this monk."

"Come, duke, do not laugh, I beg you, at those who have cared for me, and for whom I myself have felt some affection. Since his death Chicot is as sacred as a living friend, and when I have no wish to laugh I do not want any one else to do so."

"Oh! indeed, sire, I have no more desire to laugh than your Majesty. What I said was that a few minutes ago you were regretting Chicot for his good humor; that a few minutes ago you asked me to cheer you, while now you want me to make you sad — *Parfandious!* Oh! Pardon me, sire, that cursed oath is always escaping me."

"Well, well, now I am cooled down; now I am at the point at which you wished to see me when you began the conversation with your sinister insinuations. Come, tell me your bad

news, D'Épernon; there is always in the King the strength of the man."

"I do not doubt it, sire."

"And it is fortunate, for, poorly guarded as I am, if I did not guard myself I should be dead ten times a day."

"Which would not be displeasing to certain people I know."

"Against them, duke, I have the halberds of my Swiss."

"They are powerless to reach any distance."

"Against those whom it is necessary to reach from afar I have the muskets of my gunners."

"They are troublesome to handle at close range; to defend a royal breast good breasts are worth more than halberds and gunners."

"Alas!" said Henry, "those are what I once had, and in those breasts noble hearts. Never did anything happen to me in the time of those living ramparts called Quélus, Schomberg, Saint Luc, Maugiron, and Saint Mégrin."

"That, then, is what your Majesty regrets?" asked D'Épernon, counting on having his revenge by catching the King in the very act of egotism.

"I regret above all else the hearts that beat within those breasts," said Henry.

"Sire," said D'Épernon, "if I dared, I would remark to your Majesty that I am a Gascon, that is, far-seeing and industrious; that I try to supply by mind the qualities that nature has refused me; in a word, that I do all I can, that is to say, all that I ought to do, and that consequently I have the right to say: 'Come what may.'"

"Ah! that is how you get out of it; you come to me to make a great show of the dangers, true or false, that I run, and when you have succeeded in frightening me, you sum everything up in these words: 'Come what may!' Much obliged to you, duke."

"Your Majesty is pleased, then, to believe somewhat in these dangers?"

"Possibly; I will believe in them, if you prove to me that you can fight them."

"I believe that I can."

"You can?"

"Yes, sire."

"I know very well you have your resources, your little schemes, fox that you are!"

"Not so little."

"Let us see, then."

"Will your Majesty consent to rise?"

"For what purpose?"

"In order to come with me as far as the old buildings of the Louvre."

"By the Rue de l'Astruce?"

"Precisely; to the place where they were occupied in building a storehouse, a project which has been abandoned since your Majesty wishes no furniture except *prie-dieux* and chaplets of deaths' heads."

"At this hour?"

"Ten o'clock is striking from the clock at the Louvre; it is not very late, it seems to me."

"What shall I see in these buildings?"

"Ah! If I were to tell you, you would not come."

"It is very far, duke."

"Through the galleries one can reach it in five minutes, sire."

"D'Épernon, D'Épernon" —

"Well, sire?"

"If what you wish to show me is not very interesting, take care."

"I promise you, sire, that it will be interesting."

"Come, then," said the King, rising with an effort.

The duke took his cloak, and presented his sword to the King; then, taking a wax torch, he set out down the gallery, preceding his very Christian Majesty, who followed him with lagging steps.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DORMITORY.

Although it was as yet only ten o'clock, as D'Épernon had said, the silence of death invaded the Louvre; the wind was blowing so fiercely that they could scarcely hear the heavy footsteps of the sentinels and the grating of the drawbridges.

In less than five minutes the two men reached the buildings in the Rue de l'Astruce, which had preserved this name since the building of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois.

The duke drew a key from his bag, descended a few steps,

crossed a small court, and opened an arched door hidden by yellow bushes and partially obstructed by long grasses.

For ten steps he followed a dark passage, when he came to an inner court, from one corner of which rose a stone staircase. This stairway terminated in a vast chamber, or rather in an immense corridor.

D'Épernon had the key of this corridor also.

He opened the door gently, and called Henry's attention to the strange arrangement, which, when the door was opened, at once struck the eyes. The room was provided with forty-five beds, each of which was occupied by a sleeper. The King looked at the beds, and at the sleepers; then turning anxiously to the duke:

"Well!" he asked, "who are all these sleepers?"

"Men who sleep this evening, but who after tomorrow will no longer sleep, except in turn, you understand."

"And why will they not sleep?"

"That your Majesty may sleep."

"Explain yourself; all these men are your friends, then?"

"Chosen by me, sire, and tried like grain on the thrashing-floor; intrepid guards who will leave your Majesty no more than does your shadow, and who, gentlemen all of them, having the right to go everywhere your Majesty goes, will allow no one to approach within a sword's length of your Majesty."

"It is you who planned this, D'Épernon?"

"Ah! my God; yes, I alone, sire."

"People will laugh at it."

"No, they will be afraid."

"They are very terrible, then, your gentlemen?"

"Sire, they are a pack of hounds whom you may let go after such game as you please, and who, knowing only you, and having relations with none but your Majesty, will address themselves to you alone for light, heat, and life."

"But this will ruin me."

"Is a king ever ruined?"

"I cannot even pay the Swiss."

"Look well at these newcomers, sire, and tell me if they seem to you men who are expensive."

The King glanced down the long dormitory, which presented an aspect sufficiently worthy of attention, even for a king accustomed to beautiful architectural divisions. The long room

was divided in its entire length by a partition through which the builder had made forty-five alcoves, placed like so many chapels, one next the other, and opening into the passage at one end of which stood the King and D'Épernon.

A door in each of these alcoves gave access to a sort of adjoining room.

The result of this ingenious distribution was that each gentleman had his public life and his private life.

In public he appeared in the alcove; in private he withdrew to his little lodge.

The door of each of these little lodges opened on to a balcony, running the whole length of the building.

The King did not at first comprehend these subtle distinctions.

"Why do you show the men to me in this way, all asleep in their beds?" he asked.

"Because, sire, I thought that in this way the inspection would be easier for your Majesty; then these alcoves, each of which is numbered, have the advantage of transmitting the number to the occupant; thus each of these occupants will be, according to necessity, a man or a number."

"It is well thought out," said the King, "especially if we alone keep the key to all this arithmetic. But the poor fellows will suffocate if they always live in this hole."

"Your Majesty is going to make the rounds with me, if you so desire, and enter each room."

"Heavens! what storehouses you have made for me, D'Épernon!" said the King, casting his eyes at the chairs covered with the garments of the sleepers. "If I were to include the rags of these fellows with them, Paris would have a good laugh."

"It is a fact, sire," replied the duke, "that my Forty-Five are not very sumptuously clothed; but, sire, if they were all dukes and peers" —

"Yes, I understand," said the King, smiling, "they would cost me more than they wish to cost me."

"Well, that is it, sire."

"How much will they cost me? Let us see; that will decide me, perhaps; for in truth, D'Épernon, their appearance is not appetizing."

"Sire, I well know that they are somewhat thin, and burnt from the sun in our provinces of the south, but I was thin

and browned like them when I came to Paris; they will fatten and whiten like myself."

"Humph!" said Henry, looking sidewise at D'Épernon.

Then, after a pause:

"Do you know that your gentlemen snore like psalmists?" said the King.

"Sire, you must not judge them from seeing them now, they have dined very well this evening, you see."

"Ah! here is one who is dreaming aloud," said the King, listening with interest.

"Really?"

"Yes; what is he saying? Listen."

In fact, one of the gentlemen, with head and arms hanging over the bed, and mouth half opened, breathed a few words with a melancholy smile.

The King approached the bed on tiptoe.

"If you are a woman," said he, "flee! flee!"

"Ah! ah!" said Henry, "he is a gallant."

"What do you say to him, sire?"

"His face pleases me well enough."

D'Épernon brought his torch to the alcove.

"He has white hands, too, and a well-trimmed beard."

"He is Monsieur Ernauton de Carmainges; a fine fellow, and one who will amount to something."

"He has left behind some country love, poor devil!"

"To have no other love than that of his King, sire; we will take account of his sacrifice."

"Oh! oh! there is a queer figure beyond your monsieur — what did you just now call him?"

"Ernauton de Carmainges."

"Ah! yes! Plague it! what a shirt number thirty-one has! I should call it a penitent's sack."

"That one is Monsieur de Chalabre; if he ruins your Majesty, I promise you it will not be without enriching himself somewhat."

"And that other gloomy face, which does not look as though its owner were dreaming of love."

"Which number, sire?"

"Number twelve."

"Fine swordsman, heart of bronze, a man of resources, — Monsieur de Saint Maline, sire."

"Ah! but as I reflect on it, do you know that this was quite an idea, La Valette?"

"I believe so; you may judge somewhat, sire, what effect these new watch-dogs will produce, which will leave your Majesty no more than your shadow, these mastiffs which have never been seen anywhere, and which, at the first opportunity, will show themselves in a way which will do honor to us all."

"Yes, yes, you are right; it is a good idea. But listen."

"What?"

"They will not wish to follow me like my shadow in such clothes, I presume? My body is stylish looking, and I do not wish its shadow, or rather its shadows, to disgrace it."

"Ah! sire, we return to the question of figures."

"Did you think to elude it?"

"No, on the contrary, it is in all things the fundamental question; but as to these figures, I also have had an idea."

"D'Épernon! D'Épernon!" said the King.

"What do you expect, sire? The desire to please your Majesty increases my imagination."

"Well, let us see. Tell us this idea."

"Well! if it depended on me, to-morrow morning each of these gentlemen should find on the stool that bears his rags a purse of a thousand crowns in payment for the first semester."

"A thousand crowns for the first semester! six thousand pounds a year! Come, now, you are mad, duke! A whole regiment would not cost that."

"You forget, sire, that they are to be the shadows of your Majesty; and you said yourself that you desired your shadows to be decently clad. Each will have, therefore, to take from his thousand crowns sufficient to clothe and arm himself in a style to do you honor; and on the word 'honor,' let the tether go somewhat loose for the Gascons. But in allowing fifteen hundred pounds for equipment, that would be four thousand five hundred pounds for the first year, three thousand for the second, and the others."

"That is more acceptable."

"And your Majesty consents?"

"There is only one difficulty, duke."

"What?"

"Lack of money."

"Lack of money?"

"Why! you ought to know better than any one that it is not a mere excuse I am giving you, you who have not had your allowance paid."

"Sire, I have found a way."

"Of getting money for me?"

"For your guards; yes, sire."

"Some skinflint plan," thought the King, regarding D'Épernon aside. Then aloud:

"Let us see the means," said he.

"There was imposed, six months ago this very day, a fine on the rights of game and fish."

"That is possible."

"The payment of the first semester has brought in sixty-five thousand crowns, which the treasurer was going to collect this morning, when I told him to do nothing with them; so that, instead of depositing them in the treasury he holds the tax-money at the disposition of your Majesty."

"I intended it for the wars, duke."

"And rightly, sire. The first condition of war is to have men; the first interest of the kingdom is the defence and safety of the King; in assuring the guard of the King, one fulfils all these conditions."

"The explanation is not bad; but, according to your account, I see only forty-five thousand crowns used; there would, therefore, remain twenty thousand for my regiments."

"Pardon, sire, I have disposed, by your Majesty's leave, of these twenty thousand crowns."

"Ah! you have disposed of them?"

"Yes, sire; they will be part payment on my allowance."

"I was sure of it," said the King; "you give me a guard in order to get your money."

"Oh, sire, the idea!"

"But why this particular number, forty-five?" asked the King, passing on to another idea.

"This is why, sire: The number three is primordial and divine; furthermore, it is convenient. For instance, when a cavalier has three horses, he never has to walk; the second takes the place of the first which is tired; and then there remains a third to replace the second, in case of a wound or illness. You will therefore always have three times fifteen gentlemen; fifteen for service; thirty who will rest. Each

period of service will last twelve hours, and, during these twelve hours, you will always have five on your right, five on your left, two before and three behind. Let any one try to attack you with such a guard!"

"By Heaven! it is skilfully planned, duke, and I congratulate you."

"Look at them, sire; in truth, they produce a very good appearance."

"Yes; dressed, they will not be bad."

"Do you now think that I have the right to speak of the dangers which threaten you, sire?"

"I do not deny it."

"I was right, then?"

"Yes."

"Monsieur de Joyeuse would not have had an idea like that."

"D'Épernon! D'Épernon! it is not charitable to speak ill of the absent."

"*Parfandious!* you speak much ill of those present, sire."

"Ah! Joyeuse always is with me. He was with me on the Grève to-day."

"Well, I was here, sire, and your Majesty sees that I was not wasting my time."

"Thank you, La Valette."

"By the way, sire," said D'Épernon, after an instant's silence, "I had something to ask of your Majesty."

"Indeed, duke, it would greatly surprise me if you had nothing to ask of me."

"Your Majesty is bitter to-day, sire."

"Well, no; you do not understand, my friend," said the King, whose raillery had satisfied his revenge; "or rather you understand me but slightly. I said that, having rendered me a service, you had a right to ask something of me; now ask."

"It is different, sire. Besides, what I am going to ask of your Majesty is a command."

"A command! You, colonel-general of the infantry, you wish another command; but it will overpower you!"

"I am as strong as Samson in the service of your Majesty; for that I would carry heaven and earth."

"Well, ask, then," said the King, sighing.

"I want your Majesty to give me the command of these forty-five gentlemen."

"What!" cried the King, amazed, "you wish to walk before me, behind me? You wish to carry your devotion to this point? You wish to be captain of the guard?"

"No, no, sire."

"Well, what do you want, then? Speak."

"I want these guards, my countrymen, to understand my command better than that of any other; but I shall neither precede nor follow them. I shall have a second self."

"There is something behind all this," thought Henry, shaking his head, "this devil of a man always gives in order to receive."

Then aloud:

"Very well; you shall have your command."

"In secret?"

"Yes. But who, then, will be the official head of my Forty-Five?"

"The little De Loignac."

"Ah! so much the better!"

"He pleases your Majesty?"

"Perfectly."

"Is it decided then, sire?"

"Yes, but"—

"But"—

"What rôle does he play with you, this De Loignac?"

"He is my D'Épernon, sire."

"He will cost you dear, then," growled the King.

"Your Majesty says"—

"I say that I accept."

"Sire, I am going to the treasurer to get the forty-five purses."

"This evening?"

"Must not our men find them to-morrow on their chairs?"

"That is right; go. I will return home."

"Content, sire?"

"Well enough."

"Well guarded, at all events."

"Yes, by men who sleep with closed fists."

"They will watch to-morrow, sire."

D'Épernon conducted Henry as far as the door of the corridor, then left him, saying to himself:

"If I am not King, I have guards like a king, and who cost me nothing, *parfandious!*"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SHADE OF CHICOT.

The King, as we said a moment ago, was never deceived as to his friends. He knew their qualities, good and bad, and, earthly King though he was, he could read the depths of their hearts as clearly as though he were heavenly king.

He had at once understood what D'Épernon was aiming at; but as he had expected to receive nothing in exchange for what he gave, and since, on the contrary, he had received forty-five *staffiere*[1] in exchange for sixty-five thousand crowns, the idea of the Gascon seemed to him a good one. And then it was a novelty. A poor king of France is not always liberally supplied with this merchandise, so rare even for subjects, — King Henry III. especially, who, when he had had his processions, combed his dogs, counted out his deaths' heads, and heaved his desired number of sighs, had nothing further to do.

Therefore the guard instituted by D'Épernon pleased the King, particularly because it would be commented on, and because in consequence he would be able to read on the faces of the people something else besides that which he had seen on them every day since his return from Poland ten years before.

Little by little, as he drew nearer to his chamber, in which the usher, greatly perplexed at this nocturnal and unusual excursion, was waiting, Henry developed to himself the advantages of the institution of the Forty-Five, and like all weak, enfeebled minds, he gradually began to comprehend the ideas which D'Épernon had brought to light in the conversation he had just had with him.

"Well," thought the King, "the fellows will no doubt be very brave, and perhaps devoted; some of them have prepossessing faces, and others repulsive ones; there are some, thank God, to suit every one, and then it is fine, a *cortège* of forty-five swords always ready to start from their sheaths." This last link in the chain of his thoughts brought to mind the remembrance of those other swords, so devoted, which he regretted so bitterly aloud, and still more bitterly to himself, and threw Henry into that deep sadness in which he fell so often at the time of which we are writing that it might be

[1] In Italy, tall, armed footmen in cloaks. — *Tr.*

said to be his constant state. Times so hard, men so wicked, crowns so tottering on the brows of kings, impressed upon him a second time his great wish to die or be cheered, to forget for an instant the malady which at this time, the English, our masters in melancholy, had already baptized by the name of *spleen*. He looked about for Joyeuse, then not seeing him anywhere he asked for him.

"Monsieur le Duc has not yet returned," said the usher.

"Very well. Call my valets and retire."

"Sire, the chamber of your Majesty is ready, and her Majesty the Queen has asked for the orders of the King."

Henry turned a deaf ear.

"Shall I say to her Majesty," hazarded the usher, "to lay the pillow?"

"No," said Henry, "no, I have my devotions, I have my work to attend to; moreover, I am suffering. I will sleep alone."

The usher bowed.

"By the way," said Henry, calling him back, "take these preserves from the East to the Queen. They will make her sleep."

And he handed the plate to the usher.

The King entered his room, which the valets had already prepared. Once there, Henry glanced at all the accessories, so exquisite, so minute, of the extravagant toilets which he had once made in order to be the handsomest man in Christendom, not being able to be the greatest King.

But nothing now appealed to him in favor of this forced labor to which formerly he had so bravely subjected himself. All that he once had had of the woman in this hermaphrodite collection had disappeared. Henry was like those old coquettes who have changed their mirror for a prayer-book; he had almost a horror of the objects which once he had most cherished.

Gloves, perfumed and oily; masks of fine linen impregnated with paste; chemical combinations with which to curl the hair, blacken the beard, redden the ears, and make the eyes bright: he still neglected them all, as he had already done for a long time.

"My bed!" said he with a sigh.

Two servants disrobed him, put on him a pair of drawers of fine Friesland wool, and raising him with care, slipped him between the sheets.

"His Majesty's reader," cried a voice.

For Henry, a victim of long-standing and cruel insomnia,

sometimes had himself put to sleep by being read to; now a Pole was necessary to accomplish the miracle, while formerly, that is, at first, a Frenchman had sufficed.

"No, no one," said Henry, "no reader, or let him read prayers to himself for me. But if Monsieur de Joyeuse returns bring him to me."

"If he return late, sire?"

"Alas!" said Henry, "he always returns late; but at whatever hour he comes in, you understand, bring him."

The servants extinguished the candles, lighted near the fire a perfumed lamp, which gave out a pale, bluish light, a sort of phantasmagoric diversion, with which the King had seemed greatly taken since the return of his sepulchral ideas; then, on tip-toe, they left the silent chamber.

Henry, brave in the face of real danger, had all the fears, all the weaknesses of children and women. He feared apparitions, he was afraid of phantoms, and this feeling was always with him. Being afraid, he was less weary; resembling in this the captive who, tired of the idleness of a long imprisonment, replied to those who announced to him that he was about to undergo the rack:

"Good! that will help me to pass away a moment!"

However, while following the reflection of his lamp on the wall, searching the darkest corners of the room, and trying to catch the least sound which might announce the mysterious entrance of a shade, the eyes of Henry, wearied by the day's spectacle and the walk of the evening, began to grow dim, and soon he fell asleep, or rather he grew torpid in the calm and the quiet.

But his rest did not last long. Worn out by the dull fever which was consuming his life during sleep, as well as during his waking hours, he thought he heard a noise in his room and awoke.

"Joyeuse," said he, "is that you?"

No one answered.

The light from the blue lamp had grown dim; it threw on the ceiling of sculptured oak a pale circle which turned to green the gold of the cornices.

"Alone! Still alone!" murmured the King. "Ah! the prophet is right: 'Majesty should always sigh.' He would have done better to say: 'It always sighs.' Then, after an instant's pause:

"Oh, God!" he muttered, in the form of a prayer, "give me the strength to be always alone during my life, as I shall be alone after my death!"

"Ha! ha! alone after your death; that is not certain," replied a strident voice, which vibrated like a metallic sound, a few feet from the bed. "And the worms"—

The King, aghast, sat up in bed, anxiously gazing at every article of furniture in the room.

"Ah! I know that voice," he murmured.

"That is fortunate," replied the voice.

A cold perspiration stood out on the King's forehead.

"I should say it was the voice of Chicot," he sighed.

"You burn, Henry; you burn," replied the voice.

Then Henry, throwing one leg out of the bed, perceived at some distance from the chimney, in the same armchair which he had pointed out an hour before to D'Épernon, a head, on which the fire threw one of those tawny flames which, in the background of Rembrandt alone, illumine a person whom at first glance can scarcely be seen.

The reflection descended to the arm of the chair, on which was leaning an arm, then to a bony and protruding knee, then to an instep, which formed a right angle with a nervous, thin, and abnormally long leg.

"May God help me!" cried Henry; "it is the shade of Chicot!"

"Ah! my poor Henriquet," said the voice; "you are still so foolish, then?"

"What do you mean?"

"Shades do not speak, imbecile, since they have no body, and consequently no tongue," replied the figure seated in the armchair.

"You are indeed Chicot, then," cried the King, wild with joy.

"I will decide nothing in that respect; we shall see later what I am. We shall see."

"What! then you are not dead, my poor Chicot?"

"Ah, good! there you are, screaming like an eagle. Yes; on the contrary, I am dead, a hundred times dead!"

"Chicot, my only friend!"

"At least you have this advantage over me — of always saying the same thing. You are not changed, plague it!"

"But you — you" — said the King, sadly. "Are you changed, Chicot?"

"I hope so."

"Chicot, my friend," said the King, putting his two feet on the floor; "why have you left me? Tell me?"

"Because I am dead."

"But you said just now that you were not dead."

"And I repeat it."

"What means this contradiction?"

"It means, Henry, that I am dead to some and living to others."

"And for me, what are you?"

"For you I am dead."

"Why dead for me?"

"It is easy to understand; listen."

"Yes."

"You are not master in your palace."

"What?"

"You can do nothing for those who serve you."

"Maître Chicot!"

"Let us not quarrel, or I shall get angry!"

"Yes; you are right," said the King, trembling lest the shade of Chicot should vanish. "Speak, my friend, speak."

"Well, then! I had a little affair to settle with Monsieur de Mayenne, you remember?"

"Perfectly.

"I settled it finely; I thrashed the peerless captain thoroughly; he had me sought for in order to hang me, and you, on whom I counted to defend me against this hero, you abandoned me; instead of finishing him, you became reconciled with him; what did I do then? By the help of my friend Gorenflot; I declared myself dead and buried, so that since then Monsieur de Mayenne, who was seeking for me, seeks me no more."

"Frightful courage you had to do it, Chicot! Tell me, did you not know the grief that your death would cause me?"

"Yes, it was courageous, but it was not frightful at all. I have never lived as tranquilly as since every one was persuaded that I no longer lived."

"Chicot, Chicot, my friend!" cried the King, "you frighten me; I am losing my head."

"Ah, bah! you perceive that at last, do you?"

"I know not what to do but to believe."

"Well! You must, however, decide on something; what do you believe? Let us see."

"Well, I believe that you are dead, and that you have come back."

"Then I lie; you are polite."

"You hide from me a part of the truth, at least; but pretty soon, like the spectres of olden times, you will be telling me terrible things."

"Ah! I do not deny that. Prepare yourself, then, poor King!"

"Yes, yes," continued Henry, "confess that you are a spirit raised by the Lord."

"I will confess anything you wish."

"Otherwise, how could you come here through these guarded corridors? How could you be here in my room, near me? Does the first one who comes along enter the Louvre nowadays? Is it in this way that they guard the King?"

And Henry abandoning himself to the imaginary terror which had seized him, threw himself back on his bed, ready to cover his head with the sheets.

"There! there! there!" said Chicot in a tone which hid some pity and much sympathy, "there! do not excite yourself, you have but to touch me to convince yourself."

"You are not, then, a messenger of vengeance?"

"*Ventre de biche!* Have I horns like Satan, or a flaming sword like the archangel Michael?"

"Then how did you get in?"

"You insist upon this?"

"Without doubt."

"Well, understand, then, that I still have my key; the one you gave me and which I used to wear around my neck in order to infuriate the gentlemen of your chamber, who had only the right to wear it in secret; well! with this key one can enter, and I entered."

"By the secret door?"

"Yes."

"But why did you enter to-day rather than yesterday?"

"Ah! that is true, that is the question; well, you shall know."

Henry threw aside the sheets and in the naïve tone that a child would have used:

"Tell me nothing disagreeable, Chicot," he said, "I beg you. Oh, if you knew what a pleasure it is to me to hear your voice!"

"I will tell you the truth, that is all; so much the worse if the truth is disagreeable."

"Your fear of Monsieur de Mayenne is not serious, is it?" said the King.

"On the contrary, it is very serious. You understand Monsieur de Mayenne gave me fifty blows with a stick; I took my revenge and gave him back one hundred blows with the scabbard of my sword; suppose that two blows of the scabbard are equal to one blow of the stick, and we are neck and neck; *gare la belle!* Suppose that one blow of the scabbard is equal to one blow of the stick, which perhaps is the opinion of Monsieur de Mayenne, then he owes me fifty blows of the stick or the scabbard; but I fear nothing as much as debtors of this kind, and I should not even have come here, whatever you need of me, had I not known that Monsieur de Mayenne was at Soissons."

"Well, Chicot, that being so, and since it is for me that you have returned, I will take you under my protection, and I wish" —

"What do you wish? Take care, Henriquet; every time you utter the words 'I wish,' you are about to say something foolish."

"I wish you to come back to life, and show yourself openly."

"There! I said so."

"I will protect you."

"Good!"

"Chicot, I give you my royal word."

"Bah! I have something better than that."

"What have you?"

"I have my hole, and I shall stay in it."

"I will protect you, I tell you!" cried the King with energy, standing on the step of his bed.

"Henry," said Chicot, "you will take cold; get back into bed again, I beg you."

"You are right; but you do exasperate me so," said the King, returning to his sheets. "What! when I, Henry of Valois, King of France, have plenty of Swiss, of Scotch, of French guards, and gentlemen for my protection, Monsieur Chicot is not satisfied and in safety!"

"Listen, let us see; what did you say? You have the Swiss" —

"Yes, commanded by Tocquenot."

"Good, you have the Scotch" —

"Yes, commanded by Larchant."

"Very well, you have the French guards" —

"Commanded by Crillon."

"Best of all — and then?"

"And then? I do not know if I should tell you that."

"Well, don't; who asked you to?"

"And then, a novelty, Chicot."

"A novelty?"

"Yes, imagine forty-five brave gentlemen."

"Forty-five! What do you mean?"

"Forty-five gentlemen."

"Where did you find them? Not in Paris, at all events?"

"No; but they arrived in Paris to-day."

"Yes, yes," said Chicot, illuminated by a sudden idea; "I know your gentlemen."

"Indeed!"

"Forty-five beggars who lack only the wallet."

"I did not say so."

"Faces to make one die of laughter."

"Chicot, there are among them some superb men."

"Gascons, in fact, like the colonel-general of your infantry."

"And like you, Chicot."

"Oh! but with me, Henry, it is very different. I am no longer a Gascon since I left Gascony."

"While they" —

"Quite the contrary; they were not Gascons in Gascony, and they are double Gascons here."

"Never mind, I have forty-five redoubtable swords."

"Commanded by that forty-sixth redoubtable sword called D'Épernon?"

"Not exactly."

"By whom, then?"

"By De Loignac."

"Pooh!"

"You are not going to underrate De Loignac, now?"

"I will take great care not to do so; he is my cousin in the twenty-seventh degree."

"You are all related, you Gascons."

"It is entirely different with you Valois, who are never related."

"Well, will you agree?"

"To what?"

"To my Forty-Five."

"And it is with them that you count on defending yourself?"

"Yes, by Heaven! yes," cried Henry, irritated.

Chicot, or his shade, for being no better informed on this point than the King, we are obliged to leave our reader in doubt; Chicot, we say, had let himself slip down into the arm-chair, resting his heels on the edge in such a way that his knees formed the top of an angle higher than his head.

"Well! as far as I am concerned," said he, "I have more troops than you."

"Troops? You have troops?"

"Well, why not?"

"What troops?"

"You shall see. In the first place, I have the entire army which the Guises are forming in Lorraine."

"Are you crazy?"

"No, a real army, six thousand men, at least."

"But come; to what purpose should you, who are so afraid of Monsieur de Mayenne, be defended by the soldiers of Monsieur de Guise?"

"Because I am dead!"

"Again this joke!"

"But it was with Chicot that Monsieur de Mayenne was angry. I have therefore taken advantage of this death to change my body, my name, and my social position."

"Then you are no longer Chicot?" said the King.

"No."

"Who are you, then?"

"I am Robert Briquet, former merchant and Leaguer."

"You a Leaguer, Chicot?"

"A mad one; who acts, mark you, only on condition of not seeing Monsieur de Mayenne too closely; I have for my personal defence, I, Briquet, member of the sacred Union, in the first place, the army of the Lorraines, six thousand men; remember the figures."

"I will."

"Next, almost one hundred thousand Parisians."

"Famous soldiers!"

"Famous enough to greatly trouble you, my prince. Then, one hundred thousand and six thousand — one hundred and six thousand; finally the Parliament, the Pope, the Spaniards, Monsieur le Cardinal de Bourbon, the Flemish, Henry of Navarre, and the Duke of Anjou."

"Are you beginning to exhaust the list?" said Henry, impatiently.

"Not at all! there still remain three kinds of people."

"Tell me who they are."

"Who greatly complain of you."

"Tell me who they are."

"First, the Catholics."

"Ah! yes, because I have exterminated only three-quarters of the Huguenots."

"Then the Huguenots, because you have exterminated three-quarters of them."

"Ah! yes; and the third?"

"What do you say to the politicians, Henry?"

"Ah! yes, those who want neither me nor my brother nor Monsieur de Guise."

"But who very much want your brother-in-law of Navarre."

"Provided that he would abjure."

"Fine business! and how that would embarrass him, would it not?"

"Oh, as to that! but the men of whom you tell me" —

"Well?"

"Are all France."

"Exactly; they are my troops, mine, who am a Leaguer. Now come, let us add up and compare."

"We are joking, are we not, Chicot?" said Henry, feeling certain shivers run through his veins.

"As though it were the time to joke, when you are alone against the whole world, my poor Henriquet!"

Henry assumed an air of dignity thoroughly royal.

"Alone I am," said he, "but alone also will I command. You show me an army; very good. Now show me a leader. Oh! you are going to mention Monsieur de Guise; do you not see that I hold him at Nancy? Monsieur de Mayenne? You yourself admit that he is at Soissons. The Duke of Anjou?

You know that he is at Brussels. The King of Navarre? He is at Pau; while as to myself, I am alone, it is true, but free, and watching the coming of the enemy, as from the midst of a plain the hunter who is prepared for it sees his game issue from the neighboring woods."

Chicot scratched his nose. The King thought him conquered.

"What have you to reply to that?" asked Henry.

"That you are always eloquent, Henry; your tongue is still left to you; it is, in truth, more than I thought, and I offer you my very sincere congratulations; I shall attack only one thing in your discourse."

"Which?"

"Oh! my God! nothing, or almost nothing, a figure of rhetoric; I shall attack your comparison."

"In what respect?"

"In that you pretend you are the hunter on the watch for the game, while I say that, on the contrary, you are the game that the hunter is tracking into his seat."

"Chicot!"

"Come, man-lying-in-wait, whom have you seen come? Tell me."

"No one, by Heaven!"

"Yet some one has come."

"Among those of whom I told you?"

"No, not exactly."

"Who?"

"A woman."

"My sister Margot?"

"No, the Duchess of Montpensier."

"She! In Paris?"

"Yes! My God, yes!"

"Well! Even 'if that be so, since when was I afraid of a woman?"

"That is true; one should fear only men. But wait a bit. She comes as an advance courier; you understand? She comes to announce the arrival of her brother."

"The arrival of Monsieur de Guise?"

"Yes."

"And you think that that will embarrass me?"

"Oh! As for you, nothing embarrasses you."

"Hand me the ink and paper."

"What for? To sign an order for Monsieur de Guise to remain at Nancy?"

"Exactly. The idea is good, since it came to me at the same time."

"Execrable, on the contrary!"

"Why?"

"He will no sooner have received this order than he will imagine his presence is necessary in Paris, and he will hasten hither."

The King felt his anger mounting to his brow. He looked crossly at Chicot.

"If you have returned only to bring me such tidings you might well have remained where you were."

"What would you have, Henry? Phantoms are not flatterers."

"You admit, then, that you are a phantom?"

"I have never denied it."

"Chicot!"

'Come! Do not get angry, for, near-sighted as you are, you would become blind. Did you not tell me that you kept your brother in Flanders?"

"Yes, certainly; and I maintain that it is good policy."

"Now, listen, and let us not quarrel: for what purpose do you think that Monsieur de Guise remains at Nancy?"

"To organize an army there."

"Good! keep calm. For what does he intend this army?"

"Ah! Chicot, you weary me with all these questions."

"Well, be weary, Henry! You will sleep the better for it later on, I promise you. We said that he intended this army"—

"To fight the Huguenots in the north."

"Or rather to annoy your brother of Anjou, who has had himself appointed Duke of Brabant, who is trying to build for himself a little throne in Flanders, and who is constantly asking aid of you, in order to carry out this design."

"Aid which I am always promising but which I am never sending him, be it understood."

"To the great joy of Monsieur le Duc de Guise. Well, Henry, a word of advice."

"What is it?"

"If you feigned once to send him this promised aid, if this aid proceeded to Brussels, need it go more than half way?"

"Ah! yes," cried Henry; "I understand; Monsieur de Guise would not stir from the frontier."

"And the promise which Madame de Montpensier has made to us Leaguers, that Monsieur de Guise would be in Paris within eight days" —

"This promise would come to naught."

"It is you who have said it, my master," said Chicot, quietly. "Well, what think you of the advice, Henry?"

"I think it good — yet" —

"Well, what?"

"While these two gentlemen are occupied with each other up there in the north" —

"Ah! yes, the south, is it not? You are right, Henry; it is from the south that the storms come."

"In the meantime will not my third scourge be put in motion? You know what Le Bearnais is doing?"

"No, the devil!"

"He is claiming" —

"What?"

"The towns that form the dowry of his wife."

"Bah! imagine the insolent, whom the honor of being allied to the house of France does not suffice, and who allows himself to claim that which belongs to him!"

"Cahors, for instance, — as if it were good policy to abandon such a town to the enemy!"

"No, indeed, that would not be good policy; but it would be that of an honest man, for instance."

"Monsieur Chicot!"

"Let us pretend that I have said nothing; you know that I do not interfere with your family affairs."

"But that does not trouble me; I have my own ideas."

"Good!"

"Let us return to the most urgent."

"To Flanders?"

"I will send some one, then, to Flanders, to my brother — But whom shall I send? To whom can I trust a mission of this importance?"

"Well!"

"Ah! I have it!"

"I too."

"You shall go, Chicot."

"I go to Flanders? I?"

"Why not?"

"A dead man go to Flanders! Come, now!"

"Since you are no longer Chicot, but Robert Briquet" —

"Good! a bourgeois, a Leaguer, a friend of Monsieur de Guise, carrying out the duties of ambassador to Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou."

"That is to say you refuse?"

"Yes, by Heaven!"

"That you disobey me?"

"I disobey you! Do I owe you obedience?"

"You do not owe me obedience, wretched man?"

"Have you ever given me anything that holds me to you? The little I have comes to me by inheritance; I am a beggar, and unknown. Make me duke and peer; raise to a marquisate my estate of Chicoterie; endow me with five hundred thousand crowns, and then we will talk embassy."

Henry was about to answer and offer one of the good reasons that kings always find when such reproaches are made to them, when they heard the massive velvet portière slide on its rod.

"Monsieur le Duc de Joyeuse!" said the voice of the usher.

"Ah! *Ventre de biche*, here is your man!" cried Chicot. Find me an ambassador who would better represent you than Monsieur Anne; I defy you to do so!"

"Truly," murmured Henry, "this devil of a man gives better advice than I have ever had from any of my ministers."

"Ah! you admit that, then?" said Chicot.

And he sank back in the armchair, taking the shape of a ball, so that the most skilful sailor of the kingdom, accustomed to distinguish the smallest dot on the horizon, would not have noticed anything beyond the carving of the deep armchair in which he was lost.

Monsieur de Joyeuse had in vain been Grand Admiral of France, for he saw no more there than any one else.

The King gave a cry of delight on perceiving his young favorite, and held out his hand.

"Sit down, Joyeuse, my child," said he to him. "My God! You come home late!"

"Sire!" replied Joyeuse, "your Majesty is very kind to notice it."

And the duke, approaching the bed, seated himself on the pillows, embroidered in flower-patterns, that were scattered on the steps.

CHAPTER XV.

ON THE DIFFICULTY THAT A KING HAS IN FINDING GOOD AMBASSADORS.

With Chicot still invisible in his armchair, Joyeuse half reclining on the cushions, Henry softly rolled up in his bed, the conversation began.

"Well, Joyeuse," said Henry, "have you thoroughly scoured the city?"

"Why, yes, sire; pretty thoroughly, thank you," carelessly replied the duke.

"How quickly you disappeared from the Grève!"

"Listen, sire; frankly, it was not over-amusing; and then I do not like to see men suffer."

"Pitiful heart!"

"No, selfish heart; the suffering of others affects my nerves."

"You know what took place?"

"Where, sire?"

"On the Grève."

"Faith, no!"

"Salcède denied."

"Ah!"

"You take that very indifferently, Joyeuse."

"I?"

"Yes."

"I will admit to you, sire, that I did not attach great importance to what he might say; moreover, I was sure that he would deny."

"But since he had confessed."

"All the more reason. The first avowals put the Guises on their guard; they worked while your Majesty remained quiet; it was inevitable."

"What! you foresaw such things, and did not tell me?"

"Am I minister, to talk politics?"

"Let us leave that question, Joyeuse."

"Sire" —

"I have need of your brother."

"My brother, like myself, sire, is entirely at your Majesty's service."

"I may count on him, then?"

"Without doubt."

"Well, I wish to charge him with a little mission."

"Outside of Paris?"

"Yes."

"In that case, sire, it is impossible."

"How so?"

"Du Bouchage cannot leave just now."

Henry raised himself on his elbow and looked at Joyeuse with wide-open eyes.

"What does that mean?" said he.

Joyeuse bore the questioning look of the King with the greatest serenity.

"Sire," said he, "it is the easiest thing in the world to understand. Du Bouchage is in love, but he made a bad start in the affair: he set out on the wrong track, so that the poor boy is growing thinner and thinner."

"Indeed," said the King, "I have noticed it."

"And is, by Heaven, becoming sad, as though he lived at the court of your Majesty."

A kind of grunt, coming from the corner of the chimney, interrupted Joyeuse, who, thoroughly astonished, looked around.

"Pay no attention to that, Anne," said the King, laughing, "it is some dog who is dreaming on a chair. You were saying, then, my friend, that this poor Du Bouchage was growing sad."

"Yes, sire, as sad as death; it seems that somewhere he met a woman of funereal disposition — terrible things, these meetings. However, with this kind of a character one can succeed just as well as with light-hearted women; the whole thing consists in knowing how to go to work."

"Ah! you would not have been embarrassed, libertine!"

"Come! you call me libertine because I love women."

Henry heaved a sigh.

"You say that this woman is of a funereal disposition?"

"According to Du Bouchage, at least; I do not know her."

"And in spite of this sadness, you would succeed, would you?"

"By Heaven! it is only a question of working by contrasts; I know no serious difficulties except with women of medium temperament; those demand, on the part of the besieger, a

union of kindness and severity which few people succeed in combining. Du Bouchage, then, has fallen upon a sombre woman, and his love is a black one."

"Poor boy!" said the King.

"You understand, sire," continued Joyeuse, that no sooner had he taken me into his confidence than I set about to cure him."

"So that" —

"So that, at present, the cure is begun."

"He is already less in love?"

"No, sire; but he hopes the woman may become more in love, which is a more agreeable method of curing people than to take away their love from them; so from to-night, instead of sighing in unison with the lady, he is going to enliven her by every possible means; this evening, for instance, I sent to his mistress thirty or so musicians from Italy, who will do their utmost beneath her balcony."

"Poof!" said the King, "that is ordinary."

"Ordinary? Thirty musicians who have not their equal in the whole world!"

"Ah! the devil! when I was in love with Madame de Condé they could not distract me with music."

"Yes, but were you in love, sire?"

"Madly," said the King.

A fresh grunt was heard, which greatly resembled a mocking laugh.

"You see well enough that it is quite a different thing, sire," said Joyeuse, vainly endeavoring to discover whence came the strange interruption. "The lady, on the contrary, is as indifferent as a statue, as cold as an icicle."

"And you think that music will melt the icicle, animate the statue?"

"Certainly I think so."

The King shook his head.

"Well! I do not say," continued Joyeuse, "that at the first stroke of the bow the lady will throw herself into the arms of Du Bouchage; no, but she will be affected because so much fuss is made over her; little by little she will grow accustomed to the amusement, and if she does not become used to it, well, there still remain comedy, jugglers, magic, poetry, horses, every foolishness on earth, in short; so that if gayety does not return to this beautiful lonely lady, at least she will return to Du Bouchage."

"I hope so, for his sake," said Henry; "but let us leave Du Bouchage, since it is hard for him to give up Paris at present. It is not indispensable to me that he should be the one to accomplish this mission; but I hope that you, who give such good advice, have not, like him, become a slave to some sweet passion?"

"I?" cried Joyeuse, "I have never been so perfectly free in my life."

"That is fine; so you have nothing to do?"

"Absolutely nothing, sire."

"But I thought you were in love with a beautiful lady?"

"Ah, yes, the mistress of Monsieur de Mayenne; a woman who adored me."

"Well?"

"Well, imagine! this evening after having given the lesson to Du Bouchage, I left him to go to her; I arrived there with my head full of the theories I had just developed; I swear to you, sire, that I believed myself almost as much in love as Henri; well, I found a woman trembling, frightened. My first thought was that I was disturbing some one. I strove to reassure her; in vain. I questioned her; she did not reply. I wanted to embrace her; she turned aside her head, and when I frowned, she became angry, rose, we quarrelled, and she told me that she would never again be at home when I called."

"Poor Joyeuse!" said the King, laughing. "And what did you do?"

"By Heaven, sire, I took my sword and my cloak, I made a low bow, and left without once looking back!"

"Hurrah, Joyeuse, that was brave!" said the King.

"Much more brave, sire, since it seemed to me that I heard the poor girl sigh."

"Are you not going to repent of your stoicism?" said Henry.

"No, sire; if I had repented a single instant I should have run back very quickly, you understand; but nothing will rid me of the idea that the poor woman gave me up in spite of herself."

"And yet you came away?"

"Here I am."

"And you will not return?"

"Never. If I were as stout as Monsieur de Mayenne I might; but as I am thin I have a right to be proud."

"My friend," said Henry, seriously, "this rupture is very unfortunate for your safety."

"I do not deny it, sire; but in the meantime I am going to be terribly bored for a week, having nothing more to do, and not knowing what is to become of me. So some delightful ideas of idleness have occurred to me; it is amusing to be bored, really, — I have not been accustomed to it, and I shall find it *distingué*."

"I verily believe it is *distingué*," said the King. "I made it fashionable."

"This is my plan, sire; I thought it out on my way back from the square of Notre Dame to the Louvre. I will have myself brought here every day in a litter; your Majesty will say your prayers, I will read books on chemistry or on navigation, which will be still better, since I am a sailor. I shall have some little dogs which I will teach to play with yours, or rather some little cats, for they are more graceful. Then we will eat cream, and Monsieur d'Épernon will tell us stories. I, too, wish to grow fat; then, when Du Bouchage's lady from sad shall have become gay, we will seek another who from gay shall become sad; that will be a change for us; but all this without moving, sire; one is comfortable only when seated, and very comfortable only when in bed. Oh, the good pillows, sire! It is easy to see that the upholsterers of your Majesty work for a king who is bored."

"Fie, Anne!" said the King.

"Why 'fie'?"

"A man of your age and rank becoming idle and fat! What an ugly idea!"

"I do not think so, sire."

"I will give you something with which to occupy yourself."

"If it is boresome I shall like it greatly."

A third grunt was heard; one would have said that the dog was laughing at the words Joyeuse had just uttered.

"That is a very intelligent dog," said Henry, "he guesses what I want you to do."

"What do you want me to do, sire. Let us hear about it."

"You are to put on your riding-boots."

Joyeuse made a movement of terror.

"Oh! no, do not ask that of me, sire; it is against all my ideas."

"You are to mount your horse."

Joyeuse gave a start.

"My horse! No; I go now only in a litter; your Majesty did not understand, then?"

"Come, Joyeuse, a truce to jesting, do you hear me? You are to put on your boots and mount your horse."

"No, sire," replied the duke, with the greatest seriousness, "that is impossible."

"And why impossible?" demanded Henry in anger.

"Because — because — I am an admiral"

"Well?"

"And because admirals do not ride horses"—

"Ah! that is it!" said Henry.

Joyeuse answered by one of those nods of the head such as children give when they are too stubborn to obey and too timid to answer.

"Well! So be it! Monsieur l'Amiral de France, you shall not go on horseback; you are right, it is not suitable for a sailor to go on horseback. The way for a sailor to travel is by boat or galley; you will therefore immediately set out for Rouen, by boat; at Rouen you will find your admiral's galley; you will at once go on board, and you will set sail for Antwerp."

"For Antwerp!" cried Joyeuse as hopelessly as if he had received orders to leave for Canton or Valparaiso.

"I believe I said so," replied the King in an icy tone, which established without question his right as chief and his will as sovereign. "I believe I said so, and I do not wish to repeat it."

Joyeuse, without showing the slightest opposition, fastened his cloak, placed his sword under his arm, and took his velvet toque from an armchair.

"What trouble I have in being obeyed, by Heaven!" continued Henry, grumbling; "if I sometimes forget that I am master, every one else at least should remember it."

Joyeuse, mute and cold, bowed, and according to etiquette placed his hand on the guard of his sword.

"Your orders, sire?" said he, in a voice which by its tone of submission at once changed the will of the monarch to melting wax.

"You will proceed," said he, "to Rouen, where I wish you to embark, unless you prefer to go by land to Brussels."

Henry waited for a word from Joyeuse. The latter contented himself with a bow.

"Do you prefer the land route?" asked Henry.

"I have no preference, when it is a question of carrying out an order, sire," replied Joyeuse.

"Come! go! Sulk, cross-patch!" cried Henry. "Ah! kings have no friends!"

"He who gives orders can expect only to find servants," replied Joyeuse, solemnly.

"Monsieur!" replied the King, hurt. "You will go, then, to Rouen; you will board your galley; you will rally the garrisons of Caudebec, Harfleur, and Dieppe, which I shall have replaced; you will put them on board six transports, which you will place at the service of my brother, who is waiting for the aid I promised him."

"My commission, if you please, sire?" said Joyeuse.

"And since when," replied the King, "have you given up acting in virtue of your powers as admiral?"

"I have no right but to obey, and as much as I can, sire, I avoid all responsibility."

"Very well, Monsieur le Duc, you will receive the commission at your hotel when it is time to leave."

"And when will that be, sire?"

"In an hour."

Joyeuse bowed respectfully and started towards the door.

The heart of the King almost broke.

"What!" said he, "not even the courtesy of an adieu! Monsieur l'Amiral, you are not very civil; but that reproach is often made to sailors. Well, perhaps I shall have more satisfaction from my colonel-general of infantry."

"You must pardon me, sire," murmured Joyeuse, "but I am as yet a poorer courtier than sailor, and I know that your Majesty regrets what you have done for me."

And he went out, closing the door with violence behind the portière, which swelled out, blown by the wind.

"So that is how I am loved by those for whom I have done so much!" cried the King. "Ah! Joyeuse! ungrateful Joyeuse!"

"Well! are you not going to call him back?" said Chicot approaching the bed. "Because by chance you have shown a little strength, see how you repent!"

"Listen," replied the King, "you are charming! Do you think it would be pleasant to go to sea in the month of October, in the midst of rain and wind? I should indeed like to see you there, egoist!"

"You are at liberty to, great King. You are at liberty to!"

"To see you up hill and down dale?"

"Up hill and down dale; just at present my greatest desire is to travel."

"So if I were to send you somewhere, as I have just sent Joyeuse, you would accept?"

"Not only would I accept, but I beg for it, I implore."

"A mission?"

"A mission."

"You would go to Navarre?"

"I would go to the devil, great King."

"Are you jesting, buffoon?"

"Sire, I was not over-gay during my life, and I swear to you that I have been much sadder since my death."

"But you refused just now to leave Paris!"

"My gracious sovereign, I was wrong, very, very wrong, and I repent."

"So that you now desire to leave Paris?"

"At once, illustrious King; this very instant, great monarch."

"I no longer understand you," said Henry.

"Then you did not hear the words of the Grand Admiral of France?"

"What words?"

"Those in which he announced his rupture with the mistress of Monsieur de Mayenne."

"Yes, well; what of that?"

"If this woman, in love with a charming fellow like the duke, for Joyeuse is charming" —

"Without doubt."

"If this woman sends him away with a sigh, it is because she has a motive."

"Probably; otherwise she would not send him away."

"Well! do you know her motive for this?"

"No."

"You do not guess it?"

"No."

"It is that Monsieur de Mayenne is about to return."

"Oh! oh!" said the King.

"You understand at last? I congratulate you!"

"Yes, I understand, but" —

"But?"

"I do not find your reason very strong."

"Give me your reasons, Henry, I ask no better than to find them excellent; give them to me."

"Why did this woman not break with De Mayenne, instead of dismissing Joyeuse? Do you suppose that Joyeuse would not have been glad to conduct Monsieur de Mayenne to the Pré-aux-Clercs, and put a hole through his great belly? He has a sharp sword, our Joyeuse."

"True; but if Joyeuse has a sharp sword, Monsieur de Mayenne has a treacherous dagger. Remember Saint Mégrin."

Henry heaved a sigh, and raised his eyes to heaven.

"A woman who is really in love is not anxious to have her lover killed; she prefers to leave him, in order to gain time; she prefers, most of all, not to be killed herself. They are devilishly brutal in that dear house of De Guise."

"Ah! you may be right."

"That is very fortunate."

"Yes, and I begin to believe that De Mayenne will return; but you, Chicot, are not a woman, timid and in love."

"I, Henry, am a prudent man, a man who has an open account, a prearranged affair with Monsieur de Mayenne. If he finds me, he will begin again; he is a player to make one shudder, this good Monsieur de Mayenne!"

"Well!"

"Well, he will play so well that I will receive a blow from his knife."

"Bah! I know my Chicot; he does not receive without giving back."

"You are right; I would give him ten blows, which would split him open."

"So much the better; the affair would be settled."

"So much the worse, by Heaven! On the contrary, so much the worse! His family would cry out terribly; you would have the whole League on your hands, and some fine morning you would say to me: 'Chicot, my friend, excuse me, but I am obliged to have you put on the rack.'"

"I would say that?"

"You would say that, and what is worse, you would even do it, great King. Therefore I prefer the affair to turn out otherwise; you understand? I am not badly off as I am, and I want to stay so. You see, all these arithmetical progressions, applied to rancor, seem to me dangerous. I will therefore go to Navarre, if you will kindly send me."

"I certainly will."

"I await your orders, gracious prince."

And Chicot assumed the same attitude as Joyeuse.

"But," said the King, "you do not know if the mission will suit you."

"From the moment I asked you for it."

"You see, Chicot," said Henry, "I have certain ideas of making trouble between Margot and her husband."

"Divide in order to reign," said Chicot; "a hundred years ago this was the A B C of politics."

"You have no repugnance?"

"Does that concern me?" replied Chicot; "you will do as you please, great prince; you need not render an account to me, and provided I am trustworthy — Oh! as to that, you understand, I am sure."

"But still," said Henry, "you must know what to say to my brother-in-law."

"I say something? No, no, no!"

"How, no, no, no?"

"I will go where you wish, but I will say nothing. There is a proverb about that: too much flattery"—

"So you refuse, then?"

"I refuse the words, but I accept the letter. He who bears words always has some responsibility; he who presents a letter is dismissed at second hand."

"Well! so be it. I will give you a letter; that comes into my policy."

"See how it turns out! Give it to me."

"What do you say?"

"I say, give it to me."

And Chicot extended his hand.

"Ah! do not imagine that a letter like this can be written at once; it must be composed, reflected on, weighed."

"Well, weigh, reflect, compose; I will come back for it to-morrow at daybreak."

"Why do you not sleep here?"

"Here?"

"Yes, in your armchair."

"Plague it! that is done with. I shall sleep no more at the Louvre; a phantom seen sleeping in an armchair — how absurd!"

"But, nevertheless," said the King, "I want you to know

my intentions in regard to Margot and her husband. You are a Gascon; my letter will cause a sensation at the court of Navarre; you will be questioned; you will have to answer. The devil! you represent me; I do not want you to appear like a fool."

"My God!" said Chicot, shrugging his shoulders, "what an obtuse mind you have, great King! Do you imagine that I am going to carry a letter two hundred and fifty miles without knowing what it contains? Pray be easy, *ventre de biche!* at the first street corner, under the first tree I come to, I shall open your letter. Do you mean to say that for ten years you have sent ambassadors to all parts of the world, and you know no better than that? Come, put your body and soul to sleep; I will return to my solitude."

"Where is your solitude?"

"In the cemetery of the Grand Innocents, great prince."

Henry looked at Chicot with the astonishment which, for the two hours since his return, he had been unable to drive from his eyes.

"You were not expecting that, were you?" said Chicot, taking his cap and cloak. "However, this is what it is to have relations with those of the other world! Well, till to-morrow, I or my messenger."

"Good! but it will be necessary for your messenger to have a password, that it may be known he comes from you, and that the doors may be opened to him."

"Wonderful! If it is I myself, I shall come for myself; if it is my messenger, he will come for my shade."

And with these words, Chicot disappeared so softly that the superstitious mind of Henry wondered if it were really a body or a spirit which had passed through the door without causing it to creak, and under the portière without stirring one of its folds.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW AND FOR WHAT REASON CHICOT DIED.

Chicot, a real body, with all due deference to those of our readers who are sufficient believers in the marvellous to suppose that we have had the audacity to introduce a ghost into this narrative, — Chicot had gone, then, having told the King, with his customary raillery, all the truths he had to tell him.

This is what had happened.

After the death of the friends of the King, since the troubles and the conspiracies fomented by the De Guises, Chicot had begun to reflect.

Brave, as we know, and careless, he nevertheless set a great value on life, which amused him, as is the case with all fine intellects.

It is only the fools who are bored in this world and who seek distraction in the next.

The result of the reflection we have mentioned was, that the revenge of Monsieur de Mayenne seemed to Chicot more formidable than the protection of the King was efficacious; and he said to himself, with the practical philosophy which distinguished him, that in this world nothing which is really done can be undone; so that all the halberds and all the courts of justice of the King of France could not mend, slight as it might be, any opening which the knife of Monsieur de Mayenne could make in the doublet of Chicot.

He had therefore made up his mind, like a man wearied with the rôle of jester, which every moment he wanted to change to a serious one, and with his intimacy with royalty, which in those times was leading him straight to ruin.

Chicot, therefore, had begun by placing between the sword of Monsieur de Mayenne and his own skin the greatest possible distance.

With this end in view, he set out for Beaune, with the triple object of leaving Paris, embracing his friend Gorenflot, and tasting the famous wine of 1550, which was so warmly discussed in the famous letter which concludes our history of *La Dame de Monsoreau*. Let us admit that the consolation was efficacious; at the end of two months, Chicot perceived that he was growing visibly stouter, and that this helped wonderfully to dis-

guise him ; but he perceived also that in growing stout he was becoming more attached to Gorenflot than was fitting for a man of intelligence.

Mind therefore prevailed over matter.

After Chicot had drunk some hundred bottles of the famous wine of 1550, and devoured the twenty-two volumes which composed the library of the priory, and in which the prior had read the Latin axiom *Bonum vinum lætificat cor hominis*, Chicot felt a great weight in his stomach and a great void in his brain.

"I would gladly turn monk," thought he, "but with Gorenflot I should be too much master, and in any other abbey I should not be master enough. To be sure the frock would forever disguise me in the eyes of Monsieur de Mayenne ; but by all the devils ! there are other means besides ordinary ones ; let us look about. I have read in another book — it is not in Gorenflot's library — *Quære et invenies.*"

Chicot looked about, therefore, and this is what he found. For the time it was novel enough.

He opened his heart to Gorenflot, and begged him to write to the King under his dictation.

Gorenflot wrote with difficulty, it is true, but finally he wrote that Chicot had retired to the priory, that his grief at being obliged to be separated from his master, when the latter became reconciled to Monsieur de Mayenne, had undermined his health, that he had tried to struggle against it by distractions, but that grief had been too strong, and that at last he had succumbed.

For his part, Chicot himself had written a letter to the King.

This letter, dated 1580, was divided into five paragraphs.

Each of these paragraphs was supposed to have been written a day apart, and according as his disease made progress.

The first was written and signed with a firm hand. The second was traced with a less steady hand, and the signature, although still legible, was already very shaky.

He had written *Chic* . . . at the end of the third, *Ch* . . . at the end of the fourth. Finally there was a *C* . . . with an ink-spot at the end of the fifth.

This ink-spot from a dying man produced the most painful impression on the King.

This explains why he had thought Chicot a phantom and a spirit.

We would gladly give Chicot's letter, but Chicot, as they would say to-day, was a very eccentric man, and as the style is the man, his epistolary style especially was so eccentric that we do not dare to reproduce the letter here, whatever the effect might be.

But it may be found in the *Mémoires de l'Étoile*. It is dated 1580, as we have said, "the year of the great cuckoldoms," added Chicot. At the close of this letter, so that the interest of Henry might not grow cold, Gorenflot stated that since the death of his friend, the priory of Beaune had become odious to him, and that he preferred Paris.

It was this postscript especially that Chicot had had great difficulty in drawing from Gorenflot's fingers. Gorenflot, on the other hand, found it wonderfully pleasant at Beaune, as did Panurge also.

He piteously observed to Chicot that wine is always adulterated when one is not on hand to choose it on the spot. But Chicot promised the worthy prior to come in person every year to provide him with the necessary Romance, Volney, and Chambertin, and as on this point, as on many others, Gorenflot recognized the superiority of Chicot, he ended by yielding to the solicitations of his friend. On his part, in reply to the letter from Gorenflot and to the last adieux of Chicot, the King had written with his own hand:

"Monsieur le Prieur, you will give a holy and poetic burial to poor Chicot, whom I regret with all my soul, for he was not only a devoted friend, but also a very good gentleman, notwithstanding the fact that he could never trace his genealogy further back than his third great-grandfather. You will surround him with flowers, and arrange that he may rest in the sunlight, which, as he was from the south, he greatly loved. As to you, whom I honor much more for the grief which I share, if you make known your wish to do so, you will leave your priory of Beaune. I have too much need in Paris of devoted men and good priests to keep you at a distance. Consequently I appoint you prior of the Jacobins, your residence being fixed near the Porte Saint Antoine, in Paris; a quarter which our poor friend particularly loved.

"Your affectionate Henry, who begs you not to forget him in your holy prayers."

One may imagine whether such a letter coming directly from the royal hand caused the prior to open wide his eyes, whether he admired the power of Chicot's genius, and whether he hastened to take his flight towards the honors that awaited him. For, it may be remembered, ambition had already pushed one of its clinging suckers into the heart of Gorenflot, whose Christian name had always been *Modeste*, and who, since he had been prior of Beaune, called himself Dom Modeste Gorenflot. Everything happened according to the wishes of the King and of Chicot. A bundle of thorns, intended to represent, physically and allegorically, the dead body, had been buried in the sunshine, in the midst of flowers, beneath a beautiful vine stock. Then, once dead and buried in effigy, Chicot had assisted Gorenflot in moving.

Dom Modeste saw himself installed with great pomp in the priory of the Jacobins.

Chicot chose the night to glide into Paris.

He had bought, near the Porte Bussy, a small house which had cost him three hundred crowns. When he wished to see Gorenflot, he could reach him by three routes: one through the city, which was the shortest; one along the banks of the river, which was the most poetic; and lastly, the one which ran along the walls of Paris, and which was the safest.

But Chicot, who was a dreamer, almost always chose the one along the Seine; and as, in those times, the river was not embanked between stone walls, the water, as the poet says, came lapping up against its wide shores, along which the inhabitants of the Cité could see the long silhouette of Chicot outlined in the clear moonlight.

Once settled, and having changed his name, Chicot set to work to change his face; he called himself Robert Briquet, as we already know, and walked with a slight stoop; then anxiety and the successive return of five or six years had made him almost bald, so that his hair, which formerly had been curly and black, had, like the river at its ebb, retired from his forehead toward the nape of his neck.

Moreover, as we have said, he had worked at the art, dear to ancient mimics, of changing, by clever contractions, the natural play of his muscles and the habitual play of his features.

The result of this assiduous study was that seen in the light of day, and when he wished to give himself the trouble, Chicot was a veritable Robert Briquet, that is, a man whose mouth

went from ear to ear, whose chin touched his nose, and whose eyes squinted enough to make one shudder. This was done without grimaces, and not without a certain charm for lovers of change, since from being fine, long, and angular, his face had become wide, smiling, obtuse, and silly-looking. It was only his long arms and legs which Chicot could not shorten; but, as he was very industrious, he had, as we have said, bent his back, and this made his arms seem almost as long as his legs. He joined to these physiognomic exercises, the precaution of being intimate with no one.

In short, out of shape as he was, he could not eternally keep the same posture.

How could he appear hunchback at noon when he had been straight at ten o'clock? what pretext could he give a friend who suddenly saw him change his features because, while walking with him, he chanced to meet a suspicious face?

Robert Briquet, therefore, led the life of a recluse; moreover, it suited his taste; his whole diversion consisted in going to see Gorenflot, and in finishing with him the famous wine of 1550, which the worthy prior had taken care not to leave in the cellars of Beaune. But ordinary minds, like great minds, are subject to change; Gorenflot changed, though not physically.

He now saw subservient to his power and discretion the one who until then had held his destiny in his hands.

Chicot, coming to dine at the priory, seemed to him an enslaved Chicot, and Gorenflot from that moment thought too much of himself, and not enough of Chicot.

Chicot saw without offence the change in his friend; those whom he had met with near King Henry had made him grow accustomed to that sort of philosophy.

He was more careful; that was all.

Instead of going every day to the priory, he went only once a week, then every fortnight, then, finally, every month.

Gorenflot was so puffed up that he did not notice this.

Chicot was too much of a philosopher to be sensitive; he laughed in his sleeve at the ingratitude of Gorenflot and scratched his nose and chin, according to his habit.

"Water and time," said he, "are the two most powerful dissolvents that I know; the one destroys stone, the other self-love. Let us wait."

And he waited.

He was in this waiting state when the events we have just described took place, in the midst of which there seemed to arise some of those new elements which presage great political catastrophes.

But as his King, whom he, although dead to the world, still loved, seemed to him in the midst of coming events to run some dangers similar to those from which he had already preserved him, he took upon himself to appear before him as a spirit, with the sole object of foretelling the future to him.

We have seen how the announcement of the coming arrival of Monsieur de Mayenne, an announcement involved in the sending away of Joyeuse, and which Chicot with the intelligence of a monkey had sought out in its obscurity, had brought Chicot from the spirit state to that of a living man, and from the position of prophet to that of ambassador.

Now that everything which might have appeared obscure in our story is explained, we will return, if our readers are willing, to Chicot, as he set out from the Louvre, and will follow him to his little house at the Bussy cross-roads.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SERENADE.

To go from the Louvre to his house, Chicot had not far to walk.

He descended the steep bank of the river, and began to cross the Seine in a small boat, which he rowed himself, and which he had brought from the shores of Nesle and fastened to the deserted quay of the Louvre.

"It is strange," said he, as he rowed, watching the windows of the palace, one of which, that of the King's chamber, still remained lighted, in spite of the late hour of the night, "it is strange, after so many years, that Henry is just the same. Some have risen, others have fallen; some have died; he has gained a few wrinkles on his face, and in his heart, that is all; he has still the same mind, feeble and strong, whimsical and poetic; still the same selfish soul, ever demanding more than one can give; friendship for indifference, love for friendship, devotion for love, and with all that, more unhappy, more

wretched, more melancholy than any other man in his kingdom. There is, in truth, no one but myself, I believe, who understands this singular mixture of debauchery and repentance, impiety and superstition, no one but myself who knows the Louvre, through the corridors of which so many favorites have passed to the tomb, to exile or oblivion; no one but myself who can safely handle and play with that crown which burns the thought of so many, before it burns their fingers."

Chicot heaved a sigh more philosophical than sad, and bent vigorously to his oars.

"By the way," said he, suddenly, "the King did not speak to me of money for the journey; this confidence honors me in that it proves I am still his friend."

Chicot began to laugh silently, as was his habit; then, with a last stroke of the oars, he brought his boat upon the sand, where it remained. Making fast the prow to a stake by means of a knot, of which he held the secret, and which, in those innocent times (we speak by comparison), was a sufficient safeguard, he set out for his home, situated, as has been said, scarcely two gunshots from the river bank.

Upon entering the Rue des Augustins, he was attracted and greatly surprised to hear the sound of instruments and voices which filled with music the quarter, usually so quiet at this late hour.

"So! some one is getting married?" thought he at first; "*ventre de biche!* I had only five hours for sleep, and now I shall be obliged to stay awake, I, who am not getting married."

As he drew near, he saw a great light reflected upon the windows of the few houses along the street. It was caused by a dozen torches held by pages and footmen, while twenty-four musicians under the direction of an excited Italian were doing their utmost with violins, psalters, cistres, rebecs, bass-viols, trumpets, and drums. This noisy army was arranged in good order before a house which Chicot, not without surprise, recognized as his own.

The invisible general who was directing the manœuvre had placed the musicians and pages so that each face was turned towards the house of Robert Briquet, their eyes fixed on the windows, motionless, living for this contemplation alone.

Chicot stood a moment stupefied, watching all the evolutions, and listening to the racket.

Then striking his thighs with his bony hands:

"Why, there must be some mistake; it is impossible that they are making so much noise for me."

As he drew still nearer, he mingled with the crowd which the serenade had attracted, and, looking carefully around, assured himself that the light of the torches was really reflected on his house, as all the music was centred there; no one in the crowd concerned himself either with the house opposite, or with the neighboring houses.

"In truth," said Chicot to himself, "it is indeed for me; has some unknown princess fallen in love with me, perchance?"

Yet this supposition, flattering as it was, did not seem to convince Chicot.

He turned to the building opposite his own.

The two windows of this house, which looked out from the second story, and which were the only ones without blinds, absorbed at intervals some rays of light; but this was its only pleasure, poor house, which seemed deprived of all light, and robbed of every human face.

"They must sleep soundly there," said Chicot. "*Ventre de biche!* such a bacchanalia would rouse the dead!"

During all these questions and answers which Chicot was putting to himself, the orchestra continued its symphonies as though it were playing before an assembly of kings and emperors.

"Pardon me, my friend," then said Chicot, addressing a torch-bearer, "but can you tell me, please, for whom all this music is intended."

"For the bourgeois who lives over there," replied the man, pointing to the house of Robert Briquet.

"For me," said Chicot, "evidently it is for me."

He made his way through the crowd to read the answer to the enigma on the sleeves and breasts of the pages, but each coat of arms was carefully hidden beneath a grayish tabard.

"To whom do you belong, my friend?" demanded Chicot of a drummer who, having nothing to play at that moment, was warming his fingers with his breath.

"To the bourgeois who lives here," replied the musician, pointing with his stick to the house of Robert Briquet.

"Ah! ah!" said Chicot, "not only are they here for me,

but still more, they belong to me. Better and better; well, we shall see."

Arming his face with the most complicated grimace he could muster, he elbowed his way right and left among pages, lackeys, and musicians, and finally reached the door of his house, a manœuvre which he accomplished not without difficulty, and then, visible and resplendent in the circle formed by the torch-bearers, he drew his key from his pocket, opened the door, entered it, and closed and locked it. Ascending to the balcony, he brought out a leather chair, settled himself comfortably in it, and leaned his chin on the railing, without appearing to notice the laughter which greeted his appearance.

"Gentlemen," said he, "are you not making a mistake? Are your trills, cadences, and runs really for me?"

"You are Maître Robert Briquet?" demanded the director of the orchestra.

"In person."

"Well, we are entirely at your service, monsieur," replied the Italian, with a movement of his bâton which brought forth a fresh burst of melody.

"It is very strange," said Chicot to himself, letting his sharp eyes wander over the crowd and the neighboring houses.

All the inhabitants of the houses were at the windows, on the thresholds, or mingling with the groups in front of the door.

Maître Fournichon, his wife, and all the retinue of the Forty-Five — women, children, and lackeys — filled the doors and windows of *The Sword of The Proud Chevalier.*

The opposite house alone was dark, silent as a tomb.

Chicot still sought to discover with his eyes the answer to this undecipherable enigma, when all at once he thought he saw, beneath the awning of his house, between the cracks of the floor of the balcony, slightly below his feet, a man closely wrapped in a dark-colored cloak, wearing a black hat, with a red plume, and a long sword. The man evidently thought he was out of sight, and was gazing with his whole soul at the house opposite, deserted, silent, dead.

From time to time the leader of the orchestra left his post, and spoke in a low tone to this man.

Chicot quickly guessed that the whole interest of the scene lay there, and that this black hat hid the face of a gentleman. Henceforth his whole attention was riveted on this person; the

rôle of observer was easy to him, his position on the railing of the balcony making it easy for him to look into the street and under the awning; he succeeded, therefore, in following every movement of the mysterious stranger, whose first imprudent move could not fail to reveal his features to him.

Suddenly, while Chicot was wholly absorbed in his observations, a cavalier, followed by two equerries, appeared at the corner of the street, and with blows of his switch energetically drove away the crowd which was bent on gazing at the musicians.

"Monsieur Joyeuse!" murmured Chicot, who recognized the cavalier as the Grand Admiral of France, booted and spurred by order of the King. The crowd dispersed; the orchestra stopped playing.

Probably a sign from the leader had imposed silence on it.

The cavalier approached the gentleman hidden under the awning.

"Well, Henry," said he, "anything new?"

"Nothing, brother, nothing."

"Nothing!"

"No. She has not even appeared."

"Have not the fellows made an uproar then?"

"They have deafened the whole quarter."

"Did they not cry out, then, as they were told to do, that they were playing in honor of this bourgeois?"

"They shouted it out so loud that he is there in person, on his balcony, listening to the serenade."

"And has she not appeared?"

"Neither she nor any one else."

"The idea was clever, though," said Joyeuse, disappointed; "for, without compromising herself, she could have done what all these good people did, and profited by the music given to her neighbor."

Henry shook his head.

"Ah! it is easy to see that you do not know her, brother," said he.

"Yes, yes, I know her; that is to say, I know all women, and as she is one of the number, well, let us not be discouraged."

"Oh! my God! brother, you say that in a hopeless tone."

"Not in the least; only from to-day on, this bourgeois must be serenaded every evening."

"But she will move away!"

"Why, if you say nothing, if you do not point her out, if you always keep hidden? Did the bourgeois speak when this compliment was paid him?"

"He harangued the orchestra. But, look, brother! he is going to speak again."

In fact, Briquet, determined to sift out the matter, had risen to question the leader of the orchestra a second time.

"Keep still, up there, and go into the house," cried Anne, crossly; "the devil! since you have had your serenade, you have nothing to say; so keep quiet."

"My serenade, my serenade," replied Chicot, in the most gracious manner; "but I want to know to whom my serenade is given."

"To your daughter, imbecile!"

"Pardon, monsieur, but I have no daughter."

"To your wife, then."

"Thank God I am not married!"

"Well, to yourself, then, to you personally."

"Yes, to you, and if you do not go in" —

Joyeuse, suiting the action to the words, spurred his horse through the midst of the players toward Chicot's balcony.

"*Ventre de biche!*" cried Chicot, "if the music is for me, who comes to destroy my music?"

"Old fool!" growled Joyeuse, raising his head, "if you do not hide your hideous face in your crow's nest, the musicians will break their instruments over your head."

"Let the poor man alone, brother," said Du Bouchage; "the fact is that he must be greatly surprised."

"And why should he be surprised, by Heaven! Besides, you see well enough that by starting a quarrel we shall bring some one to the window; so let us give the bourgeois a thrashing, let us burn down his house, if necessary, but by Heaven! let us make a commotion, let us make a commotion!"

"For pity's sake, brother," said Henry, "let us not extort the attention of this woman; we are vanquished, so let us resign ourselves."

Briquet had not lost a word of the above conversation, which had thrown much light upon his hitherto confused ideas; he therefore made his mental preparations for defence, knowing the humor of the one who had attacked him. But Joyeuse, yielding to Henry's judgment, no longer persisted; he dismissed pages, valets, musicians, and leader.

Then drawing his brother aside:

"I am in despair," said he; "everything conspires against us."

"What do you mean?"

"Time fails me in which to help you."

"In fact, you are dressed for travelling; I had not noticed it before."

"I start to-night for Antwerp on a mission for the King."

"When did he give it to you?"

"This evening!"

"My God!"

"Come with me, I beg you!"

Henry let his arms drop.

"Do you command me to do so, brother?" said he, growing pale at the idea of leaving.

Anne made a movement.

"If you command it," continued Henry, "I will obey."

"I implore you, Du Bouchage. Nothing more."

"Thank you, brother."

Joyeuse shrugged his shoulders.

"As you will, Joyeuse; but, you see, if I had to give up spending the nights in this street, if I had to stop gazing at that window" —

"Well?"

"I should die!"

"Poor fool!"

"My heart is there, you see, brother," said Henry, raising his hand toward the house, "my life is there; do not ask me to live, if you wrench my heart from my breast."

The duke folded his arms in anger and pity, bit his fine mustache, and pondered a few moments in silence.

"If your father were to beg you, Henry," said he, "to let yourself be cared for by Miron, who is a philosopher as well as physician" —

"I should answer our father that I am not ill, that my head is sound, and that Miron cannot cure love-sickness."

"Well, we must adopt your way of looking at it, Henry; but why should I trouble myself? This woman is a woman, you are persevering; nothing, therefore, is hopeless, and on my return I shall see you more cheerful, more happy, and more merry than I myself."

"Yes, yes, my good brother," replied the young man, press-

ing the hands of his brother; "yes, I shall get better; yes, I shall be happy; thank you for your friendship; thank you! it is my most precious gift."

"After your love."

"Before my life."

Joyeuse, deeply touched in spite of his apparent frivolity, suddenly interrupted his brother.

"Shall we go?" said he; "the torches are out, the instruments on the backs of the musicians, the pages already starting."

"Go, go, brother; I will follow you," said Du Bouchage, sighing to leave the street.

"I understand you," said Joyeuse; "the last adieu before the window. That is right. Well, say adieu for me also, Henry."

Henry passed his arm around the neck of his brother, who leaned forward to embrace him.

"No," said he; "I will accompany you as far as the gates; only wait for me a hundred feet off. Believing the street deserted, perhaps she will show herself."

Anne rode toward the escort waiting a hundred feet away.

"Well," said he, "we have no further need of you until further orders; go."

The torches disappeared, the conversation of the musicians and the laughter of the pages died away, as well as the last groans drawn from the strings of the violins and lutes by the light touch of a wandering hand.

Henry gave a last look at the house, breathed a last prayer to the windows, and slowly and with continual backward glances joined his brother, who was preceded by the two equerries.

Seeing the two young men depart with the musicians, Robert Briquet supposed that the explanation of the scene, if indeed the scene was to have an explanation, was about to take place.

Consequently he withdrew noisily from the balcony and closed the window.

A few curious ones still remained obstinately at their post; but at the end of ten minutes the most persevering had disappeared. In the meantime Robert Briquet had reached the roof of his house, which was indented like that of Flemish

houses, and hiding himself behind one of these projections, he watched the windows opposite.

As soon as the noise had ceased in the street, when neither instruments nor footsteps nor voice could be heard any longer; as soon, in short, as everything had returned to its usual quiet, one of the upper windows of this strange house opened mysteriously and a head was cautiously thrust out.

"Nothing more," murmured a man's voice, "consequently no further danger; it was some mystification intended for our neighbor; you can leave your hiding-place, madam, and come down."

With these words the man closed the window, struck a spark with a piece of flint, and lighted a lamp, which he held out toward a hand extended to receive it.

Chicot looked as hard as he could. But no sooner did he perceive the pale, noble face of the woman who took the lamp, no sooner did he catch the sweet, sad look which was exchanged between servant and mistress, than he himself grew pale, and felt a cold shudder run through his veins.

The young woman, who was scarcely twenty-four years of age, descended the staircase, followed by her servant.

"Ah!" murmured Chicot, passing his hand across his brow to wipe away the perspiration, and as though striving at the same time to dispel some terrible vision, "Ah! Count du Bouchage, brave, beautiful, young man, madly in love, you spoke now of being happy, glad, and merry; pass your motto over to your brother, for nevermore will you say *hilariter*.[1]"

Then he descended to his room, his brow as gloomy as though he had been through some horrible pass, some bloody abyss, and sat down in the darkness, himself conquered, the last, but perhaps the most completely, by the incredible influence of melancholy which came from the heart of that house.

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[1] *Joyously*, the motto of Henry de Joyeuse, we have already said, was the Latin word *hilariter*.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CHICOT'S PURSE.

Chicot passed the whole night dreaming in his armchair.

Dreaming is the word, for, in truth, they were less thoughts than dreams that occupied him.

To return to the past, to see growing clear by the light of a single glance a whole epoch already almost effaced from memory, is not thinking.

All night Chicot lived in a world already left long behind him, and peopled with illustrious or graceful shades which the eyes of the pale woman, like a faithful lamp, reflected, and which glided before him, one by one, with his cortège of happy or unhappy memories.

Chicot, who had so greatly regretted his sleep on his way back from the Louvre, did not even now think of going to bed. But, when the dawn began to silver the windows of his room:

"The hour of the spirits is passed," said he, "it is necessary to think a little of the living."

He rose, girt on his long sword, threw over his shoulders a woollen cloak of dark wine color, of a texture impervious to the heaviest rains, and with the stoic firmness of a sage examined at a glance the depths of his purse and the soles of his shoes.

The latter appeared to Chicot worthy to begin a campaign; the former deserved particular attention.

We shall, therefore, make a halt in our story, in order to take time to describe it to our readers.

Chicot, a man of vivid imagination, as every one knows, had bored a hole which extended through the main beam of his house from end to end, with a diameter of eighteen inches. This beam was painted in various colors, thus serving for ornamentation as well as for solidity and use.

In this beam he had placed a chest a foot and a half long by six inches wide, which contained a thousand crowns in gold.

Now this is the calculation which Chicot made:

"I spend," he said, "every day, the twentieth part of one of these crowns; I have therefore the wherewithal to live twenty thousand days. I shall never live them, but I may reach the half, and then the older I grow, the more my needs, and con-

sequently my expenses will increase, for comfort increases in proportion to the diminution of life. All this gives me twenty-five or thirty good years to live. Well, thank God! that is fully enough."

Thus Chicot, by his calculation, found himself one of the richest gentlemen in the city of Paris, and this ease as to his future gave him a certain pride.

Not that Chicot was avaricious; for a long time, indeed, he had been prodigal, but poverty inspired him with horror, for he knew that it falls on the shoulders like a leaden cloak, and that it bows down the strongest.

Therefore, as he opened his chest to make out his account with himself, he said:

"*Ventre de biche!* the century is hard, and the times are not generous. I need have no scruples with Henry. These thousand crowns of gold do not even come from him, but from a bachelor uncle who promised me six times as much. If it were still night, I would take a hundred crowns out of the King's pocket; but it is daylight, and I have no one on whom I can depend except myself and Gorenflot."

This idea of drawing money from Gorenflot made his worthy friend smile.

"It would look fine," he continued, "if Maître Gorenflot, who owes me his fortune, should refuse to give his friend a hundred crowns for the service of the King who has appointed him prior of the Jacobins.

"Ah!" he continued, throwing back his head, "he is no longer Gorenflot.

"Yes, but Robert Briquet is still Chicot. But this letter of the King, this famous epistle intended to set the court of Navarre on fire, I should have gone for it before daybreak and here it is already dawn. Bah! I must succeed in this attempt, and if Gorenflot is not easy to persuade I will beat it into his brain. However, let me start!"

Chicot put back the plank which concealed his hiding-place, secured it with four nails, covered it with the slab, on which he scattered the dust necessary to stop up the joints, then, ready to set out, he gave a last look around the little room in which, for so many happy days, he had been as safe and as unapproachable as the heart in his breast.

He glanced at the house opposite.

"Now," said he to himself, "in order to bring the invisible

lady to her window for an instant these Joyeuse devils may some fine night set fire to my house. Well! well! but if they burn my house they will make an ingot of my thousand crowns at the same time! In truth, I think that I would be wise to bury the money. And yet, if the Joyeuses burn my house, the King will pay me for it."

Thus reassured, Chicot closed his door, the key of which he took away with him; then, as he set out toward the river bank:

"Well! well!" said he, "finding my absence suspicious, this Nicholas Poulain may very likely come here, and — Ah! but this morning I have only the ideas of a hare. Let me away, away!"

As Chicot closed the street door no less carefully than he had shut the door of his room, he perceived at the opposite window the servant of the unknown lady taking the air, hoping, no doubt, so early in the morning, to be unnoticed.

This man, as we have already said, was completely disfigured by a wound on his left temple, which extended across a part of his cheek.

One of his eyebrows, moreover, displaced by the violence of the blow, almost completely concealed his left eye, sunk deep in its socket. Strange fact! with his bald head, and grayish beard, he had sharp eyes, and the freshness of youth glowed on the cheek which had been spared.

At sight of Robert Briquet, who was descending the steps from his door, he covered his head with his hood and made a movement as if to draw back, but Chicot signed to him to wait.

"Neighbor!" cried Chicot, "the hubbub of last night has disgusted me with my house; I am going for a few weeks to my farm; would you be kind enough, from time to time, to give a look in this direction."

"Yes, monsieur," replied the stranger, "very gladly."

"And if you should see robbers" —

"I have a good musket, monsieur; be easy."

"Thank you. However, I have another favor to ask of you, neighbor."

"Speak, I am listening to you."

Chicot seemed to measure with his eye the distance which separated him from the man.

"It is rather a delicate affair to shout out to you at such a distance, dear neighbor," said he.

"In that case I will come down," replied the unknown man.

Chicot saw him disappear, and, as he had drawn nearer to the house, he heard the man's steps approaching, then the door opened, and they found themselves face to face.

This time the servant was completely hidden in his hood.

"It is very cold, this morning," said he, to hide or excuse his mysterious precaution.

"An icy wind, neighbor," replied Chicot, pretending not to notice the speaker, in order to put him at ease.

"I am listening to you, monsieur."

"Well," said Chicot, "I am leaving home."

"You have already done me the honor to say so."

"I remember perfectly; but I am leaving some money in my house."

"So much the worse, monsieur, so much the worse! Take it away with you."

"No; a man is heavier and less resolute when he seeks to save his purse at the same time as his life. Therefore I am leaving the money here; well hidden, however, in fact so well hidden that I fear only the chance of fire. If that should happen, would you, as my neighbor, be kind enough to watch the burning of a certain thick beam, the end of which you see yonder, on the right, cut in the shape of a water-shoot; watch, I say, and search among the ashes?"

"Really, monsieur," said the stranger, with a visible hesitation, "you trouble me greatly. This confidence would better be given to a friend than to a man you do not know, whom you could not know."

As he uttered these words his bright eye questioned the insipid grimace of Chicot.

"It is true," replied the latter, "I do not know you; but I have great faith in faces, and I think yours is that of an honest man."

"But see, monsieur, the responsibility you put on me. It may be that all this music will weary my mistress as it has wearied you, and that we shall move away."

"Well," replied Chicot, "then everything is said, and I shall not blame you, neighbor."

"Thank you for the confidence you put in a poor stranger," said the servant, bowing. "I shall try to show myself worthy of it."

And again bowing to Chicot, he withdrew into his house.

Chicot, on his part, bowed kindly to him; then, seeing the door closed on him:

"Poor young man!" he murmured; "he is this time a real phantom; yet I have seen him so gay, so lively, so handsome!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE PRIORY OF THE JACOBINS.

The priory which the King had given to Gorenflot, in order to recompense him for his loyal services, and especially for his brilliant eloquence, was situated about two gunshots beyond the Porte Saint Antoine.

The quarter of the Porte Saint Antoine was much frequented by the aristocracy, the King making numerous visits to the Château of Vincennes, which at this time was still called the forest of Vincennes.

Here and there along the route to the castle some small homes of great lords, with charming gardens and magnificent courts, were a sort of extension to the château, and a goodly number of rendezvous were held there, from which (in spite of the craze which at that time the smallest bourgeois had for concerning himself with affairs of state) we venture to say politics were carefully excluded. The result of this going to and coming from the court was that, other things being equal, the road was as important at that time as is the Champs Elysées to-day.

It was, one will admit, a fine site for the priory, which rose proudly on the right of the road from Vincennes.

This priory consisted of a quadrilateral of buildings, enclosing an enormous court planted with trees, a kitchen garden situated behind the buildings, and a number of smaller houses, which made the priory look as large as a village.

Two hundred monks occupied the dormitories situated at the rear of the court, parallel with the road.

In front, four large windows, opening upon an iron balcony, gave to the apartments of the priory air, light, and life.

Resembling a city which one fears might be besieged, the priory possessed in itself all the resources of the tributary territories of Charonne, Montreuil, and Saint Mandé. Its pastures

fattened a herd, always full, of fifty oxen and ninety-nine sheep; religious orders, either by traditional or by written law, could not possess a hundred of anything.

A private building also sheltered ninety-nine pigs, of a particular breed, which were raised with love and great pride by a pork-butcher chosen by Dom Modeste himself. To this honorable choice, the pork-butcher was indebted for the exquisite sausages, the stuffed ears, and the chive puddings with which he once supplied the inn of the *Corne d'Abondance.*

Dom Modeste, acknowledging the fine repasts which he had formerly had at Maître Bonhomet's, thus paid the debts of Brother Gorenflot.

It is useless to speak of the dependencies of the kitchen and the cellar. The fruit-wall of the priory, facing the south-east, produced incomparable peaches, apricots, and plums. Moreover, preserves of these fruits, and sugared pastry, were made by a certain Brother Eusèbe, author of the famous rock of confitures which the Hôtel de Ville of Paris offered to the two queens at the last state banquet given there. As to the cellar, Gorenflot had stocked it himself by emptying all those in Burgundy; for he had the innate predilection of all real wine-drinkers, who, in general, claim that the wine of Burgundy is the only true wine.

It is in the heart of this priory, a veritable paradise for idlers and gourmands, in a sumptuous apartment on the first floor, the balcony of which looked out upon the highway, that we are about to find Gorenflot, ornamented with one more chin, and showing that kind of venerable gravity which the constant habit of repose and comfort gives to the most ordinary faces.

In his robe, white as snow, with his black collar, which warmed his broad shoulders, Gorenflot no longer had the liberty of movement which he had in his gray robe of simple monk, but he had more dignity.

His hand, thick as a shoulder of mutton, rested on a quarto, which it completely covered; his large feet were almost demolishing a stove; and his arms had not length enough to encircle his body. Half-past seven in the morning had just struck.

The prior had been the last to rise, having taken advantage of the rule which gives to the head monk one more hour of sleep than to the other monks; but he was calmly prolonging his night in a deep armchair as soft as eider-down.

The furniture of the room in which the worthy abbé was sleeping was more worldly than religious; a table with twisted feet, and covered with a rich cloth, pictures of gallant religion, singular mixture of love and devotion, found only in the art of that epoch; on the dressing-stands precious vases for the church or the table; at the windows heavy curtains of Venetian brocade, more splendid, in spite of their age, than the most costly new stuffs, — such, in detail, was the wealth of which Dom Modeste Gorenflot had become possessor, and this by the grace of God, of the King, and especially of Chicot.

Thus the prior was sleeping in his armchair while the day came to make him her usual visit, and caressed with her silver beams the purplish and pearl-colored hues of the sleeper's face.

The door of the room opened softly, and two monks entered without awaking the prior. The first was a man of thirty or thirty-five, thin and pale, moving about nervously in his Jacobin robe; he carried his head high; his eyes, sharp as those of a falcon, commanded even before he spoke, and yet their glance was softened by the play of long white eyelids, which, when closed, set off the wide dark circle under his eyes. But when this black eye shone between its thick eyebrows and the tawny frame of the socket, one would have said it was the lightning flashing from the folds of two copper-colored clouds. This monk was called Brother Borromée; he had been treasurer of the convent for the past three weeks.

The other was a young man of seventeen or eighteen, short, but well formed, with bright black eyes, a fearless look, and a prominent chin. He had rolled back his wide sleeves, thus exposing with a sort of pride two nervous arms, quick to gesticulate.

"The prior still sleeps, Brother Borromée," said the younger of the two monks to the other. "Shall we waken him?"

"Let us take care not to, Brother Jacques," replied the treasurer.

"Really, it is a pity to have a prior who sleeps so long," went on the young brother, "for we could have tried the arms this morning. Did you notice what beautiful cuirasses and what fine muskets there are among them?"

"Silence, brother! You will be heard."

"How unfortunate!" continued the little monk, stamping his foot, the sound of which was deadened by the thick carpet.

"How unfortunate! It is so clear to-day; the court is so dry! What beautiful exercise we could have, brother treasurer!"

"We must wait, my child," said Brother Borromée, with feigned submission, which was contradicted by the fire in his eyes.

"But why do you not order them to distribute the arms?" asked Jacques impetuously, pushing up his fallen sleeves.

"I order?"

"Yes, you."

"I do not order; you know that very well, brother," replied Borromée, with compunction. "Is not the master here?"

"In that armchair, — asleep, — when every one is awake," said Jacques, in a tone less respectful than impatient, — "the master!" And a glance of superb intelligence seemed as if it would penetrate to the very heart of Brother Borromée.

"Let us respect his rank and his sleep," said the latter, advancing to the centre of the room, but so awkwardly that he overturned a stool.

Although the carpet lessened the noise of the stool, as it had deadened that of Brother Jacques' heel, Dom Modeste started at the sound, and awoke.

"Who is there?" he cried, in the trembling voice of a sleeping sentinel.

"Lord prior," said Brother Borromée, "pardon if we disturb your pious meditation, but I come to take your orders."

"Ah! good morning, Brother Borromée," said Gorenflot, with a slight nod of his head.

Then, after a moment's reflection, during which it was evident that he had stretched all the cords of his memory:

"What orders?" said he, blinking his eyes three or four times.

"In regard to the arms and armor."

"The arms? and armor?" said Gorenflot.

"Without doubt. Your lordship ordered arms and armor to be brought."

"To whom did I give the order?"

"To me."

"To you? — I ordered arms, I?"

"Without a doubt, lord prior," said Borromée in a steady, firm voice.

"I?" repeated Dom Modeste in great surprise. "I? and when?"

"A week ago."

"Ah! if it was a week ago — But why arms?"

"You told me, my lord, — and I will repeat your very words, — you said to me: 'Brother Borromée, it would be well to procure arms for the monks and brethren; gymnastic exercises develop the strength of the body as pious exhortations develop that of the soul."

"I said that?" said Gorenflot.

"Yes, reverend prior; and I, an unworthy but obedient brother, hastened to carry out your orders, and have procured arms."

"That is very strange," murmured Gorenflot, "but I remember nothing at all about it."

"You even added, reverend prior, this Latin saying: *Militat spiritu, militat gladio.*"

"Oh!" cried Dom Modeste, opening wide his eyes, "I added that?"

"I have a faithful memory, reverend prior," replied Borromée, modestly lowering his eyes.

"If I said so," continued Gorenflot, shaking his head gently, "it is because I had my reasons for saying so, Brother Borromée. In fact it always has been my opinion that it is necessary to exercise the body; and when I was a simple monk I fought with the word as well as with the sword. *Militat — spiritu* — very well, Brother Borromée; it was an inspiration from the Lord."

"I will go, then, and finish carrying out your orders, reverend prior," said Borromée, withdrawing with Brother Jacques, who, trembling with joy, drew him on by the hem of his gown.

"Go," said Gorenflot with dignity.

"Ah! lord prior," said Brother Borromée, returning a few seconds after his departure, "I forgot"—

"What?"

"There is a friend of your lordship in the parlor, who asks to speak with you."

"What is his name?"

"Maître Robert Briquet."

"Maître Robert Briquet," said Gorenflot, "he is not a friend, Brother Borromée, only a simple acquaintance."

"Then your reverence will not receive him?"

"Oh! yes," said Gorenflot, carelessly, "the man amuses me; let him come up."

Brother Borromée bowed a second time and withdrew. As to Brother Jacques, he made but one bound from the apartment of the prior to the room in which the arms were stored. Five minutes later the door again opened, and Chicot appeared.

CHAPTER XX.

THE TWO FRIENDS.

Dom Modeste did not change the sanctimoniously inclined position which he had assumed. Chicot crossed the room to reach him.

The prior merely bent his head gently to indicate to the newcomer that he saw him.

Chicot did not for a single instant appear surprised at the indifference of the prior; he continued to advance, and, when he had reached a respectful distance, he bowed.

"Good morning, Monsieur le Prior," said he.

"Ah! you here?" said Gorenflot; "you have come back to life, it seems?"

"Did you think me dead, Monsieur le Prior?"

"Well! you were no longer to be seen."

"I had business on hand."

"Ah!"

Chicot knew that unless warmed by two or three bottles of old Burgundy Gorenflot was sparing of words. But as, in all probability, considering the early hour of the morning, Gorenflot had not yet breakfasted, he took an easy-chair, and settled himself in silence in the chimney-corner, stretching his feet towards the fire-dogs and leaning his back against the soft chair.

"Will you breakfast with me, Monsieur Briquet?" demanded Dom Modeste.

"Perhaps, lord prior."

"You must not be vexed with me, Monsieur Briquet, if it is not possible for me to give you all the time you wish."

"Well, who the devil is asking you for your time, Monsieur le Prior? *Ventre de biche!* I did not even ask to breakfast with you; it was you who made the suggestion."

"Assuredly, Monsieur Briquet," said Dom Modeste, with a

restlessness which the very firm tone of Chicot justified; "yes, without doubt, I made the suggestion, but" —

"But you thought that I would not accept."

"Oh, no! Is it my habit to be crafty, Monsieur Briquet?"

"One adopts any habit one wishes, when one is a man of your superiority, Monsieur le Prior," replied Chicot, with one of those smiles which belonged only to him.

Dom Modeste looked at Chicot and blinked his eyes.

It was impossible to guess whether Chicot was making fun of him or speaking seriously. Chicot arose.

"Why do you rise, Monsieur Briquet?" demanded Gorenflot.

"Because I am going away."

"And why are you going? You said you would breakfast with me?"

"I did not say that I would breakfast with you, in the first place."

"Pardon me; I asked you."

"And I answered 'perhaps.' 'Perhaps' does not mean 'yes.'"

"You are angry?"

Chicot began to laugh.

"I angry!" said he, "why should I be angry? Because you are impudent, ignorant, and boorish? Oh, dear lord prior, I have known you too long a time to get angry at your little faults."

Gorenflot, amazed at this artless sally of his guest, sat with open mouth and arms extended.

"Adieu, Monsieur le Prior," continued Chicot.

"Oh, do not go."

"My journey cannot be postponed."

"You are going on a journey?"

"I have a mission."

"From whom?"

"From the King."

Gorenflot fell from abyss to abyss.

"A mission," said he; "a mission from the King! You have seen him, then?"

"Without doubt."

"And how did he receive you?"

"With enthusiasm; he has a memory, King though he is."

"A mission from the King," murmured Gorenflot; "and I impudent, I ignorant, I rude" —

His heart collapsed, like a balloon which loses its wind from the prick of a needle.

"Adieu!" repeated Chicot.

Gorenflot raised himself in his armchair, and, with his large hand, detained the ambassador, who, we must admit, let himself easily be brought back.

"Come, let us understand each other," said the prior.

"In what respect?" asked Chicot.

"As to your sensitiveness to-day."

"I? I am the same to-day as I always am."

"No."

"Simply a mirror of the people I am with."

"No."

"You laugh, I laugh; you sulk, I make a grimace."

"No, no, no!"

"Yes, yes, yes!"

"Well, come, I admit it; I was preoccupied."

"Indeed!"

"Will you not be indulgent to a man who is a victim of such hard work? Have I my own head, my God? Is not this priory like a government of a province? Remember that I command two hundred men, that I am at once economist, architect, intendant; all this without counting my spiritual duties."

"Oh, it is indeed too much for an unworthy servant of God!"

"You are ironical!" said Gorenflot; "Monsieur Briquet, have you lost your Christian charity?"

"I had some, then?"

"I believe, too, that there is some envy in your case; take care, envy is a capital offence."

"Envy in my case? And what should I envy? Tell me."

"Humph! you say to yourself: 'the Prior Dom Modeste Gorenflot is rising step by step, he is on the ascending road'" —

"While as to me, I am on the descending road, am I not?" replied Chicot, ironically.

"It is the fault of your false position, Monsieur Briquet."

"Monsieur le Prior, remember the words of the Gospel."

"What words?"

"'He who exalteth himself shall be humbled, but he who humbleth himself shall be exalted.'"

"Pooh!" said Gorenflot.

"Well, there you are doubting the Scriptures, heretic!" cried Chicot, clasping his hands.

"Heretic!" repeated Gorenflot; "the Huguenots are heretics."

"Schismatic, then!"

"Come, what do you mean, Monsieur Briquet? In truth, you confuse me."

"Nothing, except that I am starting on a journey, and that I have come to say good-by. So, adieu, my lord Dom Modeste!"

"You are not going to leave me in this way?"

"Yes, certainly."

"You?"

"Yes, I."

"A friend?"

"When one is great one no longer has friends."

"You, Chicot?"

"I am no longer Chicot; you reproached me with it a few minutes ago."

"I? When?"

"When you spoke of my false position?"

"Reproached you! Ah! What words you use to-day!"

And the prior lowered his large head, whose three chins flattened into a single one against his bull-like throat.

Chicot watched him from the corner of his eye, and saw him grow slightly pale.

"Adieu, and without bitterness for the truths I have told you."

He rose as if to go.

"Tell me anything you will, Monsieur Chicot," said Dom Modeste; "but do not look at me like that again!"

"Ah! ah! It is a little late."

"Never too late! But wait! one cannot leave without eating — the devil! it is not healthful; you have told me so twenty times yourself! So let us breakfast."

Chicot had determined to find fault with all his advantages at once.

"Faith, no!" said he; "the eating is too poor here."

Gorenflot had withstood the other attacks with courage; he succumbed under this.

"The eating is poor in my house?" he murmured, aghast.

"In my opinion, at least," said Chicot.

"You had something to complain of at your last dinner?"

"I have still the atrocious taste in my mouth; faugh!"

"You said 'faugh'!" cried Gorenflot, raising his arms to heaven.

"Yes," said Chicot, resolutely, "I said 'faugh'!"

"But why? Speak!"

"The pork cutlets were shamefully burned."

"Oh!"

"The stuffed ears did not crack between the teeth."

"Oh!"

"The rice capons tasted only of water."

"Good heavens!"

"The soup was not without grease."

"Mercy!"

"There was oil on the gravy which still swims in my stomach."

"Chicot! Chicot!" sighed Dom Modeste, in the same tone that the dying Cæsar said to his assassin, "Brutus! Brutus!"

"And then, you have no time to give me."

"I?"

"You told me you were busy; did you not, yes or no? It only remains for you to call me a liar."

"Well, we can postpone this business. It is a lady who asks to see me; that is all."

"Receive her, then."

"No, no, dear Monsieur Chicot, although she has sent me one hundred bottles of Sicilian wine."

"One hundred bottles of Sicilian wine?"

"I will not receive her, although probably she is a very great lady; I will not receive her; I wish to receive only you, dear Monsieur Chicot. She wanted to become my penitent, this great lady, and sends bottles of Sicilian wine by the hundred. Well, if you demand it, I will refuse her my spiritual advice; I will tell her to find another confessor."

"You will do all this?"

"In order to breakfast with you, dear Monsieur Chicot! to make up for my injuries to you."

"Your injuries come from your fierce pride, Dom Modeste."

"I will humble myself, my friend."

"For your indolent idleness."

"Chicot! Chicot! From to-morrow I will mortify myself by giving my monks exercise every day."

"Your monks, exercise?" said Chicot, opening his eyes; "and what exercise? That of the fork?"

"No; that of arms."

"The exercise of arms?"

"Yes; and yet it is fatiguing to command."

"You command the exercise of the Jacobins?"

"I am going to command it, at least."

"From to-morrow?"

"From to-day, if you ask it."

"And whose idea was it to give exercise to the monks?"

"Mine, apparently," said Gorenflot.

"Yours? Impossible!"

"Yes, I gave the order to Brother Borromée."

"Who is this Brother Borromée?"

"Ah! it is true you do not know him."

"Who is he?"

"He is the treasurer."

"How do you come to have a treasurer whom I do not know, rascal?"

"He arrived since your last visit."

"And whence comes this treasurer?"

"Monsieur le Cardinal de Guise recommended him."

"In person?"

"By letter, dear Monsieur Chicot, by letter."

"Was it that kite-face I saw below?"

"The same."

"Who announced me?"

"Yes."

"Oh! oh!" said Chicot, involuntarily. "And what good qualities has he, this treasurer so warmly recommended by Monsieur le Cardinal de Guise?"

"He keeps accounts like Pythagorus."

"And it is with him that you decided on these exercises of arms?"

"Yes, my friend."

"That is to say, it was he who suggested to you to arm your monks, was it not?"

"No, dear Monsieur Chicot, the idea was mine, entirely mine."

"And for what purpose?"

"For the purpose of arming them."

"No pride, hardened sinner, pride is a capital sin; this idea did not come from you."

"From me or from him; I no longer know whether the idea was his or mine. No, no, decidedly, it was mine; it even appears that on this occasion I uttered a Latin saying, very wise and very brilliant."

Chicot drew near to the prior.

"A Latin saying — you, my dear prior?" said Chicot; "and you remember this Latin saying?"

"*Militat spiritu*" —

"*Militat spiritu, militat gladio?*"

"That 's it! That 's it!" cried Dom Modeste, with enthusiasm.

"Well, well," said Chicot, "it is impossible to excuse oneself with better grace than you do, Dom Modeste; I pardon you."

"Oh!" said Gorenflot, with feeling.

"You are still my friend, my true friend."

Gorenflot wiped away a tear.

"Now let us breakfast, and I will be indulgent to the breakfast."

"Listen," said Gorenflot, with enthusiasm, "I will send word to our brother the cook that if the fare is not royal I will have him put into the dungeon."

"Do so, do so," said Chicot; "you are master, my dear prior."

"And we will uncork some of the penitent's bottles."

"I will aid you with my knowledge, my friend."

"Let me embrace you, Chicot!"

"Don't choke me, but let us talk."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE GUESTS.

Gorenflot was not long in giving his orders.

If the worthy prior was indeed on the ascending road, as he pretended, it was especially in regard to that which concerned the details of a repast and the progress of culinary science.

Dom Modeste sent for Brother Eusèbe, who appeared, not before his chief, but before his judge. From the way in which he had been summoned, he guessed that something unusual was about to take place at the reverend prior's.

"Brother Eusèbe," said Gorenflot, severely, "listen to what my friend Monsieur Robert Briquet has to say to you. You are growing careless, it seems. I have heard of grave charges brought against your last bisque, and of a serious neglect in regard to the cracking of your ears. Take care, Brother Eusèbe, take care, a single step in the wrong direction drags down the whole body."

The monk grew red and pale by turns, and stammered some excuse which was not accepted.

"Enough," said Gorenflot.

Brother Eusèbe was silent.

"What have you to-day for breakfast?" asked the reverend prior.

"I have some buttered eggs on cocks' combs."

"Next?"

"Stuffed mushrooms."

"Next?"

"Crawfish in Madeira wine."

"Of small account all that, of small account; something substantial; come, tell us quickly.

"I shall have, in addition, a ham with pistachio nuts."

"Faugh!" said Chicot.

"Pardon me," interrupted Eusèbe, timidly; "it is cooked in champagne, dry. I have larded it with some tender beef pickled in oil from Aix, so that with the fat of the beef you eat the lean of the ham, and with the fat of the ham the lean of the beef."

Gorenflot hazarded a look at Chicot accompanied by a gesture of approval.

"That is good, is it not, Monsieur Robert?" he said.

Chicot made a gesture of partial satisfaction.

"And then," asked Gorenflot, "what have you next?"

"We can cook you an eel in a minute."

"Plague on eels!" said Chicot.

"I think, Monsieur Briquet," said Brother Eusèbe, growing bold by degrees, "I think that you may taste my eels without greatly repenting it."

"Are they something special?"

"I raise them in a particular way."

"Oh! Oh!"

"Yes," added Gorenflot, "it seems that the Romans or the Greeks, I do not know which, but, at any rate, a people of

Italy, raised lampreys as Eusèbe does his eels. He read of it in an ancient author named Suetonius, who has written on cookery."

"What! Brother Eusèbe," exclaimed Chicot, "you give your eels men to eat?"

"No, monsieur, I chop up the intestines and the livers of birds and game, I add a bit of pork, and make this into a kind of sausage meat which I throw to my eels. They live in sweet fresh water, on fine gravel, and in a month grow fat and considerably longer. The one which I shall offer to the lord prior to-day, for instance, weighs nine pounds."

"It is a serpent, then," said Chicot.

"It swallowed a chicken six days old at a mouthful."

"And how have you cooked it?" asked Chicot.

"Yes, how have you cooked it?" repeated the prior.

"I skinned and browned it; strained it in anchovy butter; rolled it in fine bread raspings; then put it on the gridiron again for ten seconds, after which I shall have the honor of serving it, bathed in a sauce of allspice and garlic."

"But the sauce?"

"Yes, the sauce?"

"A simple sauce of oil from Aix, beaten up with citrons and mustard."

"Perfect," said Chicot.

Brother Eusèbe breathed again.

"Now there remains the confectionery," observed Gorenflot, judiciously.

"I will invent some dish that will please the lord prior."

"Well, I leave it to you," said Gorenflot; "show yourself worthy of my confidence."

Eusèbe bowed.

"I may retire, then?" he asked.

The prior looked at Chicot.

"Let him retire."

"Retire, and send our brother the butler to me."

Eusèbe bowed and went out. The butler succeeded Brother Eusèbe and received orders no less definite and no less detailed.

Ten minutes later, the two guests, buried in two great chairs filled with cushions, sat down opposite each other, knife and fork in hand, like two duellists. The table, covered with a fine linen cloth, and large enough for six people, was full,

however, so many were the bottles of various shapes and labels that had been accumulated by the butler.

Eusèbe, faithful to the programme, sent in the fried eggs, the crawfish, and the mushrooms, which filled the air with the gentle odor of truffles, butter as fresh as cream, thyme, and Madeira wine. Chicot set to work like a starved man; the prior, on the contrary, like a man who mistrusts himself, his cook, and his guest.

But after a few moments it was Gorenflot who devoured, while Chicot observed.

They began with Rhine wine, then passed to the Burgundy of 1550; they made an excursion into a hermitage, the date of which they did not know; they touched the Saint Perrey; at last they reached the penitent's wine.

"What do you say to it?" asked Gorenflot, having tasted it three times without venturing an opinion.

"Velvety, but light," said Chicot; "and what is the name of your penitent?"

"I do not know her."

"What! you do not know her name?"

"No, in faith, we carry on our negotiations through an ambassador."

Chicot paused and gently closed his eyes as though to taste a sip of wine which he held in his mouth before swallowing it, but in reality in order to reflect.

"So, then," said he, at the end of five minutes, "it is opposite the general of an army that I have the honor of dining?"

"Oh, my God, yes!"

"What! you sigh in saying that?"

"Ah! it is very fatiguing."

"No doubt, but it is honorable, it is beautiful."

"Superb! but I have no further quiet in the kitchen, and the day before yesterday I was obliged to suppress a dish at supper."

"Suppress a dish? and why?"

"Because several of my best soldiers, I must confess, had the audacity to find the plate of Burgundy preserves which we have every third Friday insufficient."

"The idea! Insufficient! And what reason did they give for this insufficiency?"

"They pretended that they were still hungry, and demanded

some lean meat, like teal, or lobster, or some nice-tasting fish. Do you understand these ravenous eaters ?"

"Well! If they exercise, it is not surprising that they are hungry."

"Wherein then would be the merit ?" said Brother Modeste. "Every one can eat well and work well. The devil! One must offer one's privations to the Lord," continued the worthy abbé, piling a quarter of ham and beef on his fork already respectably supplied with gelatine, of which Brother Eusèbe had not spoken, the dish being too simple, not for serving, but for figuring on the ménu.

"Drink, Modeste, drink," said Chicot; "you will strangle yourself, my dear friend; you are growing crimson."

"It is with indignation," replied the prior, emptying his glass, which contained half a pint.

Chicot let him do so; then when Gorenflot had set down his glass on the table:

"Well," said Chicot, "let us finish your story; it interests me greatly, on my honor! You took a dish from them, then, because they found that they had not enough to eat ?"

"Exactly."

"That was clever."

"But the punishment had a bad effect; I thought that they were going to rebel; their eyes snapped, their teeth chattered."

"They were hungry," said Chicot. "*Ventre de biche!* It was very natural."

"They were hungry, you say ?"

"Without doubt."

"You say so ? You think so ?"

"I am sure of it."

"Well! that evening I noticed a strange fact and one which I shall recommend to the analysis of science; I, therefore, summoned Brother Borromée, giving him my orders about the suppression of this dish, and, seeing the rebellion, I added the suppression of wine."

"Well ?" demanded Chicot.

"Well, to cap the climax, I ordered a new exercise, wishing to overcome the hydra of revolt; the Psalms say that, you know; listen: *Cabis poriabis diagonem.* Ah! you know only that, by Heaven!"

"*Proculcabis draconem,*" said Chicot, filling the prior's glass

"*Draconem*, that 's it; bravo! Àpropos of a dragon, eat some of this eel; it makes your mouth water, it is marvellous!"

"Thanks, I can no longer breathe; but the story, tell me the story."

"What story?"

"Your strange fact."

"Which one? I do not remember."

"The one you were going to recommend to the scientists."

"Ah! yes, I remember, very good."

"I am listening."

"I prescribed an exercise for the evening; I expected to see my monks thin, pale, perspiring, and I had prepared a rather good sermon on this text: 'He who eats my bread.'"

"Dry bread," said Chicot.

"Exactly, dry bread," cried Gorenflot, expanding his great jaws with a cyclopean laugh, "I should have played on the word, and I laughed over it by myself for an hour, before I found myself in the middle of the court, in the presence of a troop of fellows, excited, nervous, and jumping about like grasshoppers. This is the illusion on which I wish to consult the scientists."

"Let us see the illusion."

"The smelling of wine a mile away."

"Of wine! Brother Borromée had betrayed you, then?"

"Oh! I am sure of Borromée," said Gorenflot; "he is passive obedience personified; if I were to say to Brother Borromée to kill himself by inches, he would instantly set about to find a gridiron and begin to heat the fagots."

"That is what it is to be a poor physiognomist," said Chicot, scratching his nose, "he does not give me that impression at all."

"It is possible, but I know my Borromée, you see, as well I know you, my dear Chicot," said Dom Modeste, who was growing tender as he became drunk.

"And you say they smelled of wine?"

"Borromée?"

"No, the monks."

"Like casks, without counting the fact that they were as red as lobsters; I mentioned the fact to Borromeé."

"Bravo!"

"Ah! I do not go to sleep."

"And what did he answer?"

"Listen, it was very subtle."

"I imagine so."

"He replied that a very great appetite produces results similar to those of gratified desires."

"Oh! oh!" said Chicot; "indeed that was very subtle, as you say; *ventre de biche!* He is a very strong man, your Borromée; I am no longer surprised that he has such a thin nose and lips; and this convinced you?"

"Entirely, and you will be convinced yourself, but we shall see; come a little nearer to me. for I can no longer move without feeling dizzy."

Chicot drew near.

Gorenflot made a speaking-tube of his large hand, which he applied to Chicot's ear.

"Well?" said Chicot.

"Well, I will continue. Do you recall the time when we were young, Chicot?"

"I remember."

"The time when the blood boiled — when mad desires" —

"Prior! Prior!" said modest Chicot.

"It is Borromée who speaks, and I maintain that he is right. Did not appetite sometimes produce the illusions of reality?"

Chicot began to laugh so loudly that the table with all its bottles trembled like the deck of a ship.

"Well, well," said he, "I will put myself in Brother Borromée's school, and when he shall have thoroughly infused his theories into me, I will ask a favor of you, my lord."

"It shall be granted you, Chicot, like everything else that you ask of your friend. Now tell me, what is this favor?"

"You shall give me the stewardship of the priory for just eight days."

"And what will you do during these eight days?"

"I will nourish Brother Borromée on his theories; I will serve him with a plate and an empty glass, and will say to him: 'Desire with all the strength of your hunger and thirst a turkey with mushrooms, and a bottle of Chambertin; but be careful not to get drunk with the Chambertin; be careful not to have indigestion from this turkey, dear philosopher.'"

"So," said Gorenflot, "you do not believe in appetite, pagan?"

"Well! well! I believe what I believe. But let us say no more about theories."

"So be it," said Gorenflot. "Let us say no more about theories, but let us talk a little about reality." And Gorenflot emptied a full glass.

"To that good time you spoke of just now, Chicot," said he, "to our suppers at the *Corne d'Abondance!*"

"Bravo! I thought you had forgotten all that, my lord."

"Profane one! All that sleeps under the majesty of my position; but by Heaven, I am always the same."

And Gorenflot began to sing his favorite song, in spite of the "hush" of Chicot:

"When the ass untethered is,
When the wine gives forth its fizz,
The happy ass uplifts his ears,
The wine in sparkling foam appears.
But naught is flatter than the monk
Who drinks, and drinks, until he 's drunk,
And naught is ever half so free,
As is the monk at liberty!"[1]

"Hush, hush, man!" cried Chicot, "if Brother Borromée were to enter, he would think that you had neither eaten nor drunk for a week."

"If Brother Borromée were to enter, he would sing with us."

"I do not believe it."

"And I, I tell you" —

"So keep still, and answer my questions."

"Speak, then."

"You do not give me a chance, drunkard."

"Oh! Drunk! I!"

"Well, the result of your exercise of arms is that your convent is turned into a veritable barracks."

"Yes, my friend, that is the word, veritable barracks, barracks veritable; last Thursday — was it Thursday? Yes, it was Thursday; wait a minute, I am not sure that it was Thursday."

"Thursday or Friday, the day makes no difference."

"That is so, the fact is everything, is it not? Well, Thurs-

[1] "*Quand l'ânon est deslâché,*
Quand le vin est débouché,
L'ânon dresse son oreille,
Le vin sort de la bouteille;
Mais rien n'est si éventé
Que le moine en pleine treille;
Mais rien n'est si desbâté
Que le moine en liberté."

day or Friday, in the corridor, I found two novices fighting each other with swords, and two seconds preparing to have a brush together on their own account."

"And what did you do?"

"I had a whip brought with which to thrash the novices, who fled; but Borromée" —

"Ah, ah! Borromée, Borromée again!"

"Always."

"But Borromée?"

"Borromée caught them, and flogged them for me in such a manner that they are still in bed, the wretches!"

"I shall have to ask to see their shoulders to appreciate the strength of Brother Borromée's arm," said Chicot.

"Disturb ourselves in order to see other shoulders than those of mutton? — never! Come, eat some of these apricot patés."

"No, by Heaven! I should choke."

"Drink, then."

"No more! I have to walk."

"Well, do you suppose that I do not have to walk? and yet I drink."

"Oh! it is different with you; and then to give commands you must have lungs."

"Then a glass, just one glass, of this digestive liqueur, of which Eusèbe alone knows the secret."

"Agreed."

"It is so efficacious that if one had dined like a glutton, one would be hungry two hours after dinner."

"What a recipe for the poor! Do you know that if I were king, I would have Eusèbe's head removed; his liqueur is capable of starving a kingdom. Oh! oh! what is that?"

"It is the exercise which is beginning," said Gorenflot.

In fact, a great clamor of voices and arms rose from the court.

"Without the leader?" said Chicot. "Oh! oh! the soldiers are poorly disciplined, it strikes me."

"Without me? Never!" said Gorenflot. "Moreover, that could not be, you understand, since it is I who command, since it is I who instruct; and listen, the proof is that I hear Brother Borromée coming for my orders."

In fact, at that very moment Borromée entered, casting at Chicot as oblique and swift a glance as the traitorous arrow of a Parthian.

"Oh! oh!" thought Chicot, "you were wrong to give me that look; it has betrayed you."

"Lord prior," said Borromée, "we are waiting for you to begin your examination of the arms and cuirasses."

"Cuirasses! oh! oh!" said Chicot to himself, softly, "one instant, I must go too, I must go too!" And he rose hurriedly.

"You will be present at my manœuvres," said Gorenflot, rising in turn, like a block of marble which took to itself legs; "your arm, my friend; you will see some fine drilling."

"The fact is that the lord prior is a profound tactician," said Borromée, sounding Chicot's imperturbable physiognomy.

"Dom Modeste is a superior man in all things," replied Chicot, bowing.

Then in a low tone to himself:

"Oh! oh!" he murmured, "we must play close, my eaglet, or there is a kite who will pluck out your feathers."

CHAPTER XXII.

BROTHER BORROMÉE.

As Chicot, supporting the reverend prior, descended the great stairway to the court of the priory, the first impression was that of an immense barracks in full activity.

Divided into two companies of one hundred men each, the monks, armed with halberd, pike, or musket, awaited like soldiers the coming of their commander.

About fifty of the strongest and most zealous had covered their heads with casques or helmets; long swords were attached to belts around their waists; absolutely nothing was lacking but a buckler to make them resemble the ancient Medes, or turned-up eyes to liken them to the modern Chinese. Others proudly spread out bulging cuirasses, against which they loved to rattle their iron gauntlets.

Still others, enclosed in armlets and thigh-pieces, exercised themselves in developing their joints deprived of elasticity by these partial shells.

Brother Borromée took a casque from the hands of a novice, and placed it on his head with a movement as easy and natural as a reiter or a German foot-soldier would have done.

While he was fastening the straps, Chicot could not refrain from looking at the helmet; and as he looked he smiled; at length, still smiling, he walked around Borromée, as though admiring him from every point.

He did more: he approached the treasurer and passed his hand over one of the projections of the helmet.

"You have a magnificent headpiece, Brother Borromée," said he; "where did you buy it, my dear prior?"

Gorenflot could not reply, because at that instant they were fastening on him a resplendent cuirass, which, although spacious enough for the Farnesian Hercules, painfully repressed the luxurious undulations of the worthy prior's flesh.

"Do not tie that so tight, by Heaven!" cried Gorenflot; "do not squeeze so hard; I shall suffocate, I shall have no more voice. Enough! enough!"

"You asked the reverend prior, I believe," said Borromée, "where he had bought my helmet?"

"I asked the reverend prior, and not you," replied Chicot, "because I presumed that in this convent, as in all others, nothing was done except by order of the superior."

"Certainly," said Gorenflot, "nothing is done here except by my order. What were you asking, dear Monsieur Briquet?"

"I asked Brother Borromée if he knew where this casque came from."

"It was part of a lot of armor which the reverend prior bought yesterday, in order to arm the convent."

"I?" said Gorenflot.

"Your lordship, you will remember, ordered several casques and cuirasses to be brought here, and the orders of your lordship have been carried out."

"That is true, that is true," said Gorenflot.

"*Ventre de biche!*" said Chicot, "my helmet was greatly attached to its master, since, having carried it myself to the Hôtel de Guise, like a lost dog, it finds me in the priory of the Jacobins!"

At that moment, upon a sign from Brother Borromée, the lines became straight, and silence settled upon the ranks.

Chicot seated himself on a bench, in order to enjoy the manœuvres at his ease.

Gorenflot stood as stiff on his legs as though they were two posts.

"Attention!" said Brother Borromée, in a low tone.

Dom Modeste drew a gigantic sabre from its iron scabbard, and brandishing it in the air, cried in stentorian tones:

"Attention!"

"Your reverence perhaps will tire yourself in giving the commands," said Brother Borromée, with gentle attention. "Your reverence was suffering this morning; if it please you to spare your precious health, I will command the drill to-day."

"I should indeed be glad," said Dom Modeste; "in fact, I am suffering, I am suffocating; proceed."

Borromée bowed, and like a man accustomed to this kind of assent, he took his position in front of the troop.

"What an obliging servant!" said Chicot; "that fellow is a treasure."

"He is charming! I told you so," replied Dom Modeste.

"I am sure that he does the same thing for you every day," said Chicot.

"Oh! every day. He is as submissive as a slave; I do nothing but reproach him for his kindnesses. Humility is not slavery," added Gorenflot, sententiously.

"So that you really have nothing to do here, and you can sleep on both ears; Brother Borromée watches for you?"

"Oh! my God, yes!"

"That is what I wanted to know," said Chicot, whose attention was fixed on Borromée alone.

It was marvellous to see the treasurer of the monks, like a war-horse bridling under the harness. His dilated eyes looked like balls of fire; his strong arm gave such clever exhibitions of the sword that one would have said he was a veritable master fencing before a company of soldiers.

Each time that Brother Borromée made a demonstration, Gorenflot repeated it, adding:

"Borromée is right; but I have already told you that; remember my lesson of yesterday. Pass the weapon from one hand to the other; hold up the pike, hold it up; the steel on a level with your eye; steady, by Saint George! firm; a half turn to the left is exactly the same as a half turn to the right, except that it is just the opposite."

"*Ventre de biche!*" said Chicot, "you are a very clever instructor."

"Yes, yes," said Gorenflot, caressing his triple chin. "I understand the manœuvres well enough."

"And you have an excellent pupil in Borromée."

"He understands me," said Gorenflot; "he is as intelligent as can be."

The monks went through the drill, a sort of manœuvre greatly in vogue at that time, the passes with gun, sword, pike, and the other exercises, with spirit.

When they came to the last test:

"You will see my little Jacques," said the prior to Chicot.

"Who is your little Jacques?"

"A nice fellow whom I have wished to attach to my person, because to all appearances he is calm, with a strong hand, but with all that as quick as a flash."

"Ah, indeed! And where is this charming fellow?"

"Wait, wait, I will point him out to you; there, see, over yonder; the one holding a musket in his hand, and who is the first ready to fire."

"And he aims well?"

"Even at a distance of a hundred feet, the fellow does not fail to hit the mark."

"He is one who ought to assist you at mass, but it is your turn to wait now."

"What?"

"Why, yes! — but no!"

"You know my little Jacques?"

"I? Not in the least.

"But you thought you knew him at first?"

"Yes, it seemed as though I had seen him in a certain church one day, or rather one night when I was shut up in a confessional; but no, I was mistaken, it is not he."

This time, we must admit, Chicot's words were not exactly in accordance with the truth. Chicot was too good a physiognomist ever to forget a face when he had once seen it.

While he was the unconscious object of the attention of the prior and his friend, little Jacques, as Gorenflot called him, was loading a heavy musket as long as himself. When this was done he proudly took his position a hundred feet from the mark; and then, bringing back his right leg with a precision wholly military, he took aim.

The shot was fired, and the ball lodged in the centre of the mark, amid the loud applause of the monks.

"By Heaven, that is well aimed," said Chicot; "on my word, he is a pretty boy."

"Thank you, monsieur," replied Jacques, whose pale cheeks flushed with pleasure.

"You handle arms skilfully, my boy," went on Chicot.

"Oh! monsieur, I am only practising," said Jacques.

And with these words he laid down his musket, after the proof of skill which he had given, took a pike from the hands of his neighbor, and twirled it round in a way that Chicot considered perfect.

The latter renewed his compliments.

"It is especially with the sword that he excels," said Dom Modeste. "Those who understand it consider him very good; it is true that the rascal has muscles of iron, wrists of steel, and that he scrapes the sword from morning till night."

"Ah! let us see it," said Chicot.

"You wish to test his strength?" asked Borromée.

"I should like to prove it," replied Chicot.

"Ah!" continued the treasurer, "no one here except perhaps myself is capable of fencing with him; do you handle the sword?"

"I am only a poor bourgeois," said Chicot, shaking his head; "once I could fence as well as any one; but to-day my limbs tremble, my arm shakes, and my head is no longer steady."

"But you practise still?" said Borromée.

"A little," replied Chicot, glancing at Gorenflot, who smiled and uttered the name of Nicolas David.

But Borromée neither saw the look nor heard the name, and with a calm smile ordered the foils and fencing-masks brought out.

Jacques, eager with delight, under his cold and quiet manner raised his gown as far as his knees, and fixed his sandals firm in the sand as he made his challenge.

"Indeed," said Chicot, "since I am neither monk nor soldier it is some time since I have practised with arms, therefore I beg you, Brother Borromée, you, who are nothing but muscles and tendons, to be good enough to give the lesson to Brother Jacques. Will you consent to it, dear prior?" asked Chicot of Dom Modeste.

"I order it!" exclaimed the prior, always delighted to give a command.

Borromée took off his helmet, Chicot hastened to extend his hands, and the casque, placed in them, again permitted its former master to prove its identity; then, while our bourgeois

examined it, the treasurer tucked his gown into his belt and made ready. All the monks, animated by party spirit, formed a circle about the professor and pupil. Gorenflot leaned over to his friend's ear.

"It is as entertaining as chanting vespers; is it not?" said he, innocently.

"That is what the light horse would say," replied Chicot in the same naïve way.

The two combatants put themselves on guard; Borromée, quick and nervous, had the advantage of height; he had besides assurance and experience.

Fire shot in swift gleams from the eyes of Jacques, and brought an excited flush to his cheeks. Little by little they saw the religious mask fall from Borromée, as, foil in hand, and carried away by the alluring action of the trial of skill, he was transformed into a man-of-arms; he accompanied each thrust with an exhortation, a suggestion, or a reproach; but often the strength, the promptness, and the energy of Jacques triumphed over the qualities of his master, and Brother Borromée received a good thrust full in the chest. Chicot devoured the spectacle with his eyes, and counted the thrusts.

When the onset was over, or rather when the fencers made a first halt,

"Jacques has touched six times," said Chicot, "Brother Borromée nine; that is rather pretty for the pupil, but not enough for the master."

A flash, unnoticed by all except Chicot, passed from Borromée's eyes, and revealed a new trait in his character.

"Ah!" thought Chicot, "he is proud."

"Monsieur," replied Borromée, in a tone which with great difficulty he managed to keep gentle, "the exercise of arms is very hard for every one, and especially for poor monks like us."

"No matter," said Chicot, determined to force Maître Borromée to his limit; "the master ought not to have less than half the advantage over his pupil."

"Ah! Monsieur Briquet," said Borromée, pale and biting his lips, "you are very positive, it seems to me."

"Good! he is angry," thought Chicot, "two mortal sins; they say that one is enough to damn a man. I have a good hand."

Then aloud:

"And if Jacques were more calm," said he, "I am sure that he would give equal play."

"I do not think so," said Borromée.

"Well, I am sure of it."

"Monsieur Briquet, who understands arms," said Borromée in a bitter tone, "should test Jacques' strength by himself; then he would be better able to judge."

"Oh! I am old," said Chicot.

"Yes, but skilful," said Borromée.

"Ah! you are joking," thought Chicot; "wait, wait. But," he continued, "there is one thing which detracts from the value of my observation."

"What is that?"

"That Brother Borromée, like a worthy master, I am sure, let Jacques touch a little out of kindness."

"Ah! ah!" said Jacques, scowling in turn.

"No, indeed," replied Borromée, keeping control over himself, but inwardly exasperated; "I love Jacques, of course, but I do not spoil him with that kind of kindness."

"It is astonishing," said Chicot, as though speaking to himself, "I thought so; excuse me."

"But come," said Borromée, "try for yourself, Monsieur Briquet."

"Oh, do not intimidate me," said Chicot.

"Be easy, monsieur," said Borromée, "we will be indulgent to you; we know the laws of the church."

"Heathen!" murmured Chicot.

"Come, Monsieur Briquet, just one pass."

"Try," said Gorenflot, "try."

"I will not hurt you, monsieur," said Jacques, in turn taking the part of his master, and desiring to have his little fling; "I have a very light hand."

"Dear child!" murmured Chicot, giving the young monk an inexpressible glance which ended in a silent laugh.

"Well," said he, "since every one wishes it" —

"Ah! bravo!" cried those interested, with the appetite of triumph.

"But," said Chicot, "I warn you that I accept only three passes."

"As you wish, monsieur," said Jacques.

Rising slowly from the bench on which he had seated himself, Chicot tightened his doublet, drew on his gauntlets,

and adjusted his mask with the agility of a tortoise catching flies.

"If this fellow succeeds in parrying your straight thrusts," whispered Borromée to Jacques, "I will never fence with you again; I warn you."

Jacques gave a nod of the head, accompanied by a smile which meant:

"Be easy, master."

Chicot, with the same slowness and the same care, put himself on guard, straightened out his long arms and legs, which, by a miracle of precision, he disposed so as to hide their enormous elasticity and incalculable development.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE LESSON.

At this time, not only the events, but also the customs and habits of which we are trying to describe, fencing was not what it is to-day.

The swords, sharp at both edges, were such that they could strike almost as often with the edge as the point; moreover, the left hand, armed with a dagger, was at once defensive and offensive; the result was a number of wounds or rather scratches, which in a real combat were a powerful motive for excitement.

Quélus, losing blood from eighteen wounds, still stood erect, continued to fight, and would not have fallen had not a nineteenth wound sent him to his bed, which he left only for the tomb.

Fencing, brought from Italy, but still in the infancy of its art, consisted, therefore, at this time, in a number of evolutions which considerably displaced the fencer, and, on a ground chosen at random, and possibly uneven, he must have encountered a number of obstacles. It was not unusual to see a fencer bend forward, draw back, spring to the right or left, and lean one hand on the ground; agility, not only of hand and of limb, but of the whole body, was one of the first conditions of the art.

Chicot did not seem to have learned fencing in this school; one would have said, on the contrary, that he had anticipated

the modern art, the superiority and especially the whole grace of which lies in the agility of the hands and the almost absolute repose of the body.

He stood erect and firm on both legs, with a wrist at once supple and nervous, with a sword which seemed a flexible and pliant reed from the point to the middle of the blade, and which was of inflexible steel from there to the guard.

At the first passes, seeing before him this man of bronze, whose wrist alone seemed alive, Brother Jacques showed some impatience, which produced on Chicot no other effect than to make him straighten his arm and limb at the slightest opening which he perceived in the play of his adversary; and one can understand that with this habit of striking as much with the edge as the point, these openings were frequent.

At each of these openings, Chicot's great arm was thrust forward three feet, and dealt straight at the brother's breast a stroke of the button as methodical as though directed by some mechanism, and not by an organ of flesh, uncertain and uneven.

At each of these strokes of the button, Jacques, crimson with anger and ambition, sprang back.

For ten minutes the boy displayed every resource of his prodigious agility; he sprang like a tiger, he coiled like a serpent, he glided under the breast of Chicot, springing to right and left, but the latter, with his quiet manner and his long arm, seized his opportunity, and, warding off the foil of his adversary, always sent the terrible button home.

Brother Borromée grew pale from the suppression of all the passions which had lately roused him.

At length Jacques rushed a last time at Chicot, who, seeing that he was shaky on his legs, offered him an opening in order that he might make a lunge.

Jacques did not miss it, and Chicot, parrying with swiftness, caused the poor boy to lose his balance so that he forgot his nerve and fell.

Chicot, motionless as a rock, remained in the same place.

Brother Borromée bit his fingers till they bled.

"You did not tell us, monsieur, that you were a pillar of the fencing-school," said he.

"He!" cried Gorenflot, wonder-struck, but triumphant from a feeling of friendship easy to understand: "he! why, he never goes out!"

"I, a poor bourgeois," said Chicot; "I, Robert Briquet, a pillar of the fencing-school! Oh, Monsieur Treasurer!"

"But indeed, monsieur," cried Brother Borromée, "in order to handle a sword as you do, you must have had great practice."

"Well, my God, yes, monsieur," replied Chicot, good-naturedly. "As a matter of fact I have sometimes held a sword; but in holding it I have always noticed one thing."

"What?"

"That for the one who holds it, pride is a bad counsellor, and anger a poor aid. Now listen, my young Brother Jacques," he added, "you have a pretty wrist, but you have neither legs nor head; you are quick, but you do not reason. There are three essential points in fencing: first the head, then the hand, and finally the legs; with the first one may defend one's self; with the first and the second one may win; but by combining the three, one always wins."

"Oh, monsieur," said Jacques, "have a match with Brother Borromée; it will surely be a fine thing to see."

Chicot, disdainful, was about to refuse the suggestion; but he reflected that perhaps the proud treasurer would take advantage of it.

"Well," said he, "if Brother Borromée consents, I am at his disposal."

"No, monsieur," replied the treasurer; "I should be defeated; I prefer to admit this rather than prove it."

"Oh! how modest, how amiable he is!" said Gorenflot.

"You are mistaken," replied the pitiless Chicot into his ear, "he is mad with vanity; at his age, if I had had such a chance I would have begged on my knees for the lesson which Jacques has just received." Whereupon, Chicot resumed his stooping back, his bent limbs, his eternal grimace, and seated himself again on his bench.

Jacques followed him, the admiration of the man prevailing over the shame of his defeat.

"Give me some lessons, Monsieur Briquet," said he; "the lord prior will allow it, will you not, your reverence?"

"Yes, my child," replied Gorenflot, "with pleasure."

"I do not want to step into your master's province, my friend," said Chicot, and he bowed to Borromée.

Borromée spoke.

"I am not Jacques' only master," said he, "I am not the

only one who teaches arms here; not having the honor all to myself, permit me not to take all the defeat."

"Who is his other instructor, then?" hastily demanded Chicot, seeing on Borromée's face the flush which betrayed his fear of having committed an imprudence.

"No one," said Borromée, "no one."

"Yes, yes!" said Chicot, "I heard perfectly. Who is your master, Jacques?"

"Ah! yes, yes," said Gorenflot, "a short, fat fellow whom you presented to me, Borromée, and who occasionally comes here; a good face and a pleasant drinker."

"I do not remember his name," said Borromée.

Brother Eusèbe, with his sanctimonious mien and his knife in his belt, advanced simpering.

"I know it," said he.

Borromée made numerous signs to him which he did not see.

"It is Maître Bussy Leclerc," he continued, "the one who was fencing-master at Brussels."

"Ah! oh!" said Chicot; "Maître Bussy Leclerc! A good swordsman, in faith!"

And as he said this with all the innocence of which he was capable, Chicot caught the furious glance which Borromée darted at the smiling but unfortunate Eusèbe.

"Ah! I did not know that he was named Bussy Leclerc. They forgot to tell me," said Gorenflot.

"I did not suppose that the name would be of the slightest interest to your lordship," said Borromée.

"In fact," said Chicot, "one fencing-master or another, what difference does it make, provided he is good?"

"In fact, no difference at all," said Gorenflot, "provided he is good." Whereupon he started toward the staircase that led to his apartment, followed by the admiration of all.

The exercise was over.

At the foot of the staircase Jacques repeated his request to Chicot, to the great displeasure of Borromée; but Chicot replied:

"I do not know how to teach, my friend. I taught myself all alone, by thought and practice; do as I did; success follows every earnest effort."

Borromée ordered a movement which turned all the monks toward the buildings for the return.

Gorenflot leaned on Chicot and majestically ascended the staircase.

"I hope," said he, with pride, "that here is a house devoted to the service of the King, and good for something, eh?"

"Plague it! I well believe it," said Chicot; "one sees fine things, reverend prior, when one visits you."

"In one month all this, in less than a month, even."

"And done by you?"

"Done by me, by me alone, as you see," said Gorenflot, straightening himself.

"It is more than I expected, my friend, and when I return from my mission" —

"Ah! that is true, dear friend; let us speak of your mission!"

"The more willingly as I have a message, or rather a messenger, to send to the King before my departure."

"To the King, dear friend, a messenger? You correspond, then, with the King?"

"Directly."

"And you need a messenger, you say?"

"I need a messenger."

"Do you want one of our brethren? It would be an honor for the convent if one of our brethren were to see the King."

"Assuredly."

"I will place two of our best legs at your disposal. But tell me, Chicot, how the King, who believed you dead" —

"I have already told you that I was merely in a lethargy, and at the right moment I came back to life again."

"And restored to favor?" demanded Gorenflot.

"More than ever," said Chicot.

"Then," said Gorenflot, stopping, "you can tell the King everything that we do here in his interest?"

"I shall not fail to do so, my friend, I shall not fail; be easy."

"Oh! dear Chicot," cried Gorenflot, who saw himself a bishop.

"But first, I have two things to ask of you."

"What are they?"

"The first is money, which the King will return to you."

"Money!" cried Gorenflot, rising hastily, "my coffers are full of it."

"You are very fortunate, by my faith," said Chicot.

"Do you want a thousand crowns?"

"No, that is much too much, dear friend; I am modest in my tastes, humble in my desires; my title of ambassador does not make me proud, and I hide it rather than boast of it; one hundred crowns will suffice."

"Here they are. And the second thing?"

"A squire."

"A squire?"

"Yes, to accompany me. I like society."

"Ah! my friend, if I were only free as I once was," said Gorenflot, heaving a sigh.

"Yes, but you are not."

"Greatness ties me down," murmured Gorenflot.

"Alas!" said Chicot; "one cannot do everything at the same time; not being able to have your honorable company, my very dear prior, I will content myself with that of young Brother Jacques."

"Young Brother Jacques?"

"Yes; the fellow pleases me."

"You are right, Chicot; he is an unusual boy and will amount to something."

"I will first take him two hundred and fifty miles, if you will allow me."

"He is yours, my friend."

The prior rang a bell, at the sound of which a brother servant appeared.

"Send Brother Jacques to me, and the brother who carries messages to the city."

Ten minutes later both appeared on the threshold of the door.

"Jacques," said Gorenflot, "I am going to give you a special mission."

"Me, Monsieur le Prior?" said the young man, surprised.

"Yes; you are to accompany Monsieur Robert Briquet on a long journey."

"Oh!" exclaimed the young brother, delighted at the thought of travelling, "I go on a journey with Monsieur Briquet? I, out of doors, at liberty! Ah! Monsieur Robert Briquet, we will practise fencing every day, shall we not?"

"Yes, my child."

"And I may carry my musket?"

"You may carry it."

Jacques gave a jump and rushed from the room with shouts of joy.

"As to the commission," said Gorenflot, "I beg you to give your orders. Approach, Brother Panurge."

"Panurge!" said Chicot, to whom this name recalled memories which were not without tenderness; "Panurge!"

"Alas! yes," said Gorenflot, "I chose this brother, who has the same name as the other Panurge, to make journeys like the other one."

"Is our old friend out of service, then?"

"He is dead," said Gorenflot; "he is dead."

"Oh!" said Chicot with commiseration. "The fact is he must have been getting old."

"Nineteen years, my friend; he was nineteen years old."

"That is a case of remarkable longevity," said Chicot; "the convents alone offer such examples!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE PENITENT.

Thus announced by the prior, Panurge soon appeared. It was certainly not on account of his moral or physical configuration that he had been allowed to replace his defunct namesake, for never had a more intelligent face been dishonored by the application of the name of ass.

It was a fox that Brother Panurge resembled, with his small eyes, pointed nose, and protruding jaw.

Chicot watched him a moment, and during that moment, short as it was, he seemed to appreciate the value of the convent messenger.

Panurge stood humbly by the door.

"Come here, Monsieur le Courier," said Chicot. "Do you know the Louvre?"

"Yes, monsieur," replied Panurge.

"And in the Louvre, do you know a certain Henry of Valois?"

"The King?"

"I do not know if he is really the King," said Chicot; "but at least we are in the habit of calling him so."

"It is with the King that I have to do?"

"Exactly. Do you know him?"

"Very well, Monsieur Briquet."

"Well, you will ask to speak with him."

"Will they let me enter?"

"As far as his valet, yes; your gown is a passport; his Majesty is very religious, as you know."

"And what shall I say to his Majesty's valet?"

"You will say that you are sent by the Shade."

"By what shade?"

"Curiosity is a bad fault, brother."

"Pardon me."

"You will say, then, that you are sent by the Shade."

"Yes."

"And that you are waiting for the letter."

"What letter?"

"Again!"

"Ah! that is true."

"Reverend prior," said Chicot, turning to Gorenflot, "I really prefer the other Panurge."

"That is all there is to do?" asked the courier.

"You will add that the Shade will wait, going slowly along the road to Charenton."

"It is on this road that I am to rejoin you, then?"

"Exactly."

Panurge proceeded to the door, and as he raised the portière to go out it seemed to Chicot that he unmasked a listener. But the portière fell back so rapidly that Chicot could not say positively whether that which he took for reality was anything but an illusion or not; his subtle mind, however, quickly led him to the almost certain conclusion that Brother Borromée was there.

"Ah! you are listening," he thought; "so much the better; in that case I will speak for your benefit."

"So," said Gorenflot, "you are honored with a mission from the King, dear friend."

"Confidential, yes."

"Which has to do with politics, I presume."

"And I too presume so."

"What! you do not know with what mission you are charged?"

"I know that I carry a letter, that is all."

"A state secret, no doubt?"

"I suppose so."

"You do not doubt it?"

"We are sufficiently alone for me to tell you what I think, are we not?"

"Speak; I am a tomb for secrets."

"Well, the King has finally decided to aid the Duc d'Anjou."

"Really?"

"Yes; Monsieur de Joyeuse was to have set out this evening for this purpose."

"But you, my friend?"

"I am going in the direction of Spain."

"And how shall you travel?"

"Why! as we used to do, on foot, on horseback, by carriage, as best we can."

"Jacques will be good company for the journey, and you did well to ask for him; he understands Latin, the young rascal!"

"I confess for my part that he pleases me greatly."

"That would be reason enough for me to give him to you, my friend; but I think, besides, that he will be a formidable second for you in case of any encounter."

"Thanks, dear friend; now I have nothing further to do, I think, than to bid you adieu."

"Adieu!"

"What are you doing?"

"Preparing to give you my blessing."

"Bah! between us," said Chicot, "that is useless."

"You are right," replied Gorenflot, "it is good for strangers only."

The two friends embraced each other tenderly.

"Jacques!" cried the prior, "Jacques!"

Panurge showed his fox-like face between the portières.

"What! You are not yet gone?" cried Chicot.

"Pardon, monsieur."

"Go quickly," said Gorenflot, "Monsieur Briquet is in a hurry. Where is Jacques?"

Brother Borromée appeared in turn, sweet and smiling.

"Brother Jacques!" repeated the prior.

"Brother Jacques has gone," said the treasurer.

"Gone!" cried Chicot.

"Did you not want some one to go to the Louvre, monsieur?"

"But it was Brother Panurge," said Gorenflot.

"Oh! how stupid I am! I understood that it was Jacques," said Borromée, slapping his forehead.

Chicot scowled; but Borromée's regret was apparently so sincere that a reproach would have seemed cruel.

"I will wait, then," said he, "until Jacques returns."

Borromée bowed, frowning in turn.

"By the way," said he, "I forgot to announce to the lord prior, and I came up on purpose to do so, that the unknown lady has just arrived and that she desires to have an audience with your reverence."

Chicot opened his large ears.

"Alone?" asked Gorenflot.

"With a servant."

"Is she young?" asked Gorenflot.

Borromée modestly lowered his eyes.

"Good! He is a hypocrite," thought Chicot.

"She seems young!" said Borromée.

"My friend," said Gorenflot, turning to the false Robert Briquet, "you understand?"

"I understand," said Chicot, "and I will leave you; I will wait in an adjoining room or in the court."

"Do so, my dear friend."

"It is far from here to the Louvre, monsieur," observed Borromée, "and Brother Jacques may be greatly delayed, especially as the person to whom you write may perhaps hesitate to entrust a letter of importance to a child."

"You make this reflection somewhat late, Brother Borromée."

"Why! I did not know; if you had confided in me" —

"Well, well, I will start and walk slowly towards Charenton; whoever the messenger is he will overtake me on the road."

And he started toward the stairway.

"Not that way, monsieur, if you please," said Borromée, quickly; "the unknown lady is coming up there, and she particularly wishes to meet no one."

"You are right," said Chicot, smiling; "I will take the small stairway."

And he advanced toward a private door leading to a small study.

"And I," said Borromée, "shall have the honor of introducing the penitent to the reverend prior."

"That is so," said Gorenflot.

"You know the way?" asked Borromée, anxiously.

"Perfectly."

Chicot went into the study; adjoining this was a room in which was the head of the private stairway.

Chicot had spoken the truth; he knew the way, but he did not know the room.

In fact, it had been greatly changed since his last visit: from peaceful it had grown warlike — the sides of the walls were covered with arms; the tables and the stands were loaded with sabres, swords, and pistols; every corner was a nest of muskets and arquebuses. Chicot paused for a moment in this room; he felt the need of reflecting.

"They hide Jacques from me, they hide the lady from me, they drive me to the small stairway, in order to leave the large one free; that means they wish to keep me away from the young monk, and to hide the lady from me; it is evident I ought to make a strategic move, and do exactly the opposite of what they wish me to do. Consequently, I shall await the return of Jacques, and I shall place myself so that I can see the mysterious lady. Oh! oh! here is a beautiful shirt of mail thrown into this corner, supple, fine, and of exquisite quality."

He raised it admiringly.

"Just what I was looking for," said he; "as light as linen, and much too narrow for the prior; in truth, one would say that this shirt had been made for me. We will borrow it, therefore, from Dom Modeste; I will give it back to him on my return."

And Chicot hastily folded the tunic and slipped it under his doublet.

He was fastening the last knot when Brother Borromée appeared on the threshold.

"Oh! oh!" murmured Chicot, "you again! but you come too late, friend."

And crossing his long arms behind him, Chicot turned his back as though to admire the trophies.

"Monsieur Robert Briquet is looking for some arms to his liking?" asked Borromée.

"My dear friend," said Chicot, "what should I do with weapons?"

"But when one handles them so well."

"Theory, dear brother, theory, that is all; a poor bourgeois like myself may be clever with his arms and legs, but what he lacks, and what he will always lack, is the spirit of a soldier. The foil shines brightly enough in my hand, but Jacques, believe me, would make me jump from here to Charenton with the point of a sword."

"Really!" said Borromée, half convinced by the simple, good-natured manner of Chicot, who had made himself more hump-backed, more crooked, and more squint-eyed than ever.

"And then my breath fails me," went on Chicot; "you noticed that I could not bend; my legs are execrable; that is my chief defect."

"Permit me to observe, monsieur, that this defect is still greater for travelling than for exercising with arms."

"Ah! you know that I am going to travel?" said Chicot, carelessly.

"Panurge told me so," replied Borromée, reddening.

"Why, that is queer. I did not think I had spoken of it to Panurge; but no matter, I have no reason for hiding the fact. Yes, brother, I am taking a short trip; I am going to my own country where I have property."

"Do you know, Monsieur Briquet, that you have procured a very great honor for Brother Jacques?"

"That of accompanying me?"

"In the first place, but afterwards that of seeing the King."

"Or his valet, for it is possible and even probable that Brother Jacques will see no one else."

"You are intimate at the Louvre?"

"Oh! very, monsieur. It is I who furnish the King and the young lords of the court with milled hosiery."

"The King?"

"I already had his custom when he was only duke of Anjou. On his return from Poland he remembered me and appointed me court furnisher.

"You have a fine connection there, Monsieur Briquet."

"My connection with his Majesty?"

"Yes."

"Every one does not say that, Brother Borromée."

"Oh! the Leaguers."

"Every one is more or less that to-day."

"You are *less*, surely."

"I, why?"

"When one knows the King personally."

"Well! well! I have my politics, like others," said Chicot.

"Yes, but your politics harmonize with those of the King."

"Don't you believe it; we often dispute."

"If you dispute how can he entrust you with a mission?"

"A commission, you mean?"

"Mission or commission, no matter which, either the one or the other implies confidence."

"Pooh! provided that I understand how to take my measurements, that is all that is necessary for the King."

"Your measurements!"

"Yes."

"Political measurements, financial measurements?"

"No, measurements of cloths."

"How?" said Borromée, astonished.

"Without doubt you will understand."

"I am listening."

"You know that the King made a pilgrimage to Notre Dame de Chartres."

"Yes, to obtain an heir."

"Exactly. You know that there is a sure means of arriving at the result desired by the King?"

"It seems, at all events, that the King does not employ this means."

"Brother Borromée!" said Chicot.

"What?"

"You know perfectly well that it is a question of obtaining an heir to the crown by a miracle, and not otherwise."

"And this miracle they ask for?"

"Is at Notre Dame de Chartres."

"Ah! yes, the chemise!"

"Come, now! that's it. The King took the chemise from this good Notre Dame, and gave it to the Queen, so that in exchange for this chemise, he wants to give the former a robe similar to that of Notre Dame of Toledo, which is, they say, the most beautiful and the richest robe of the Virgin that exists in the world."

"So that you are going" —

"To Toledo, dear Brother Borromée, to Toledo, to take the measurements of this robe and make one like it."

Borromée seemed to hesitate as to whether he should believe

Chicot or not. After mature reflection, we are authorized to suppose that he did not believe him.

"You may judge, therefore," continued Chicot, as though he had utterly forgotten what was passing in the mind of the treasurer, "you may judge, therefore, whether the society of churchmen would not have been very agreeable under such circumstances. But time goes on, and Brother Jacques cannot be long now. Besides, I will wait outside for him — at the Croix Faubin, for instance."

"I think that will be better," said Borromée.

"You will have the kindness, then, to tell him as soon as he comes?"

"Yes."

"And you will send him to me?"

"I will not fail to do so."

"Thanks, dear Brother Borromée, charmed to have made your acquaintance."

Both bowed; Chicot descended the small staircase; behind him, Brother Borromée closed and locked the door.

"Well, well," said Chicot, "it is important, it seems, that I should not see the lady; I must, therefore, arrange to see her."

In order to put this project into execution, Chicot left the priory of the Jacobins with as much ostentation as possible, spoke an instant with the gate-keeper, and set out toward the Croix Faubin, keeping in the middle of the road.

But, once arrived at the Croix Faubin, he disappeared around a corner of the wall of a farm, and there, feeling that he could defy all the arguses of the priory, had they the eyes of a falcon, like Borromée, he glided along the buildings, followed through a ditch a winding hedge, and without having been seen, reached a thick hedge of elm trees which extended directly opposite the convent.

Arrived at this point, which offered him all that he could desire as a centre of observation, he seated himself or rather lay down, and waited for Brother Jacques to return and enter the convent, and for the lady to come out.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE AMBUSCADE.

Chicot, we know, was not long in making up his mind.

He decided to wait, and as comfortably as possible.

He made an opening in the thick hedge, so that he might not miss seeing those who came and went who might be of interest to him.

The road was deserted.

As far as Chicot's eye could reach, he saw neither horseman, beggar, nor peasant.

The whole crowd of the previous evening had vanished with the spectacle that had caused it. Chicot saw nothing, then, but a man rather shabbily dressed, who was walking across the road, taking measurements with a long pointed stick on the pavement of his Majesty the King of France.

Chicot had absolutely nothing to do.

He was delighted to have found this man, who would be something for him to look at.

What was he measuring? Why was he measuring? Such, for one or two minutes, were the most serious reflections of Maître Robert Briquet.

He therefore determined not to lose sight of him.

Unfortunately, at the moment when, arrived at the end of his measuring, the man was about to raise his head, a more important discovery arose to absorb his attention, forcing him to turn his eyes in another direction.

The folding windows on Gorenflot's balcony opened, and there appeared the respectable rotundity of Dom Modeste, who, with his great wide-open eyes, his holiday smile, and his most gallant manner, led out a lady almost wholly enveloped in a mantle of velvet trimmed with fur.

"Oh! oh!" said Chicot to himself, "here is the penitent. Her appearance is youthful; let us see her head a little; there, there, turn a little this way; that is fine! It is really singular that I find resemblances in every face I see. Sorry mania that I have! Good, there is the attendant. Oh! oh! as to him, I am not mistaken; it is indeed De Mayneville. Yes, yes; the turned-up mustache, the basket-hilted sword — it is he himself. But let us reason a little: if I am not deceived in

De Mayneville, *ventre de biche!* why should I be deceived in Madame de Montpensier? for that woman, yes, yes! by Heaven! it is the duchess."

Chicot, one may well believe, from this moment abandoned the man who was measuring, so as not to lose sight of the two illustrious personages.

At the end of a second he saw the pale face of Borromée appear behind them, to whom Mayneville put several questions.

"Yes," said he, "so it is with every one; bravo! let us plot, it is the fashion; but the devil! Does the duchess, by chance, want to take rooms at Dom Modeste's? — she already has a house at Bel Esbat, a hundred feet from here."

Just then Chicot was given a new cause of excitement.

While the duchess was talking with Gorenflot, or rather making him talk, Monsieur de Mayneville signed to some one outside.

Chicot, however, had seen no one, except the man who was measuring.

It was, in fact, to him that the sign had been made; the result was that the man who was measuring measured no more. He stopped in front of the balcony, his face turned in the direction of Paris.

Gorenflot continued his amiabilities with the penitent.

Monsieur de Mayneville whispered a few words into Borromée's ear, and the latter instantly began to gesticulate behind the prior, in a manner unintelligible to Chicot, but clear, apparently, to the man who was measuring, for the latter moved off and took his position in another place, where another sign from Borromée and De Mayneville nailed him like a statue.

After standing motionless for a few seconds, at another sign from Brother Borromée he gave himself up to a kind of exercise which interested Chicot the more in that it was impossible for him to guess its meaning.

From the place he occupied, the man who was measuring began to run to the door of the priory, while Monsieur de Mayneville held his watch in his hand.

"The devil! the devil!" murmured Chicot. "All this looks suspicious; the enigma is well put; but, perhaps by seeing the face of the man who is measuring, I may guess it."

Just then, as if the evil genius of Chicot had set out to grant his wish, the man who was measuring turned, and Chicot recognized him as Nicholas Poulain, lieutenant of the provost-

ship, the very one to whom, on the previous evening, he had sold his old cuirasses.

"Ah!" said he, "long live the League! I have now seen enough to guess the rest, with a little work! Well, so be it! we will work."

After some conversation between the duchess, Gorenflot, and de Mayneville, Borromée closed the window, and the balcony became deserted.

The duchess and her attendant came out of the priory and entered the litter that awaited them.

Dom Modeste, who had accompanied them to the door, exhausted himself in bows.

The duchess was still holding back the curtains of the litter to reply to the compliments of the prior, when a Jacobin monk, coming from Paris by the Porte Saint Antoine, appeared at the head of the horses, which he looked at curiously, then at the side of the litter, into which he gazed.

Chicot recognized this monk as the young Brother Jacques, returning in great haste from the Louvre, and now standing in ecstasy before Madame de Montpensier.

"Well, well," said he, "I am in luck. If Jacques had returned sooner, I would not have seen the duchess, compelled as I was to run to my meeting-place at the Croix Faubin. Here is Madame de Montpensier leaving after her little conspiracy is arranged; now it is Maître Nicholas Poulain's turn. I will settle him in ten minutes."

In short, the duchess, having passed in front of Chicot without seeing him, was rolling away toward Paris and Nicholas Poulain was preparing to follow.

Like the duchess, it was necessary for the latter to pass by the hedge behind which lay Chicot.

Chicot saw him coming, as a hunter sees the game and makes himself ready to fire when it comes within shot.

When Poulain had come within range of Chicot, Chicot fired his words.

"Well, my good fellow," said he from his hole, "a look in my direction, if you please."

Poulain gave a start and turned his head toward the ditch.

"You have seen me, very good!" said Chicot; "now look as though you saw nothing, Maître Nicholas — Poulain."

The lieutenant of the provostship bounded like a deer at the sound of a gun.

"Who are you?" said he, "and what do you want?"

"Who am I?"

"Yes."

"I am one of your friends; new, but intimate. What do I want? Ah! that is somewhat long to explain to you."

"But what do you want? Speak."

"I want you to come to me."

"To you?"

"Yes, here; I want you to step down into the ditch."

"Why?"

"You shall know why; step down first."

"But" —

"And I want you to sit down with your back against this hedge."

"Well" —

"Without looking toward me, without your appearing to suspect that I am here."

"Monsieur" —

"It is a good deal to ask, I well know; but what can you expect? Maître Robert Briquet has the right to demand."

"Robert Briquet!" exclaimed Poulain, at the same time doing as he was told.

"There, there, sit down; that's it. Ah! ah! it seems that we were taking our little measurements on the road to Vincennes!"

"I?"

"Without a doubt; after all, what is there surprising in the fact that a lieutenant of the provostship should carry out the duty of overseer of the roads, when the opportunity occurs?"

"That is true," said Poulain, somewhat reassured, "you see I was measuring."

"And much the better," continued Chicot, "since you were working under the eyes of very illustrious personages."

"Of very illustrious personages? I do not understand."

"What! you did not know" —

"I do not know what you mean."

"That lady and gentleman who were on the balcony, and who have just gone back to Paris; you do not know who they are?"

"I swear to you."

"Ah! how fortunate it is for me to tell you such rich news!

Imagine, Monsieur Poulain! you had for admirers, in your duties of overseer, Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier and Monsieur le Comte de Mayneville. Do not stir, if you please."

"Monsieur," said Nicholas Poulain, trying to struggle, "these suggestions, the manner in which you make them to me" —

"If you move, my dear Monsieur Poulain," replied Chicot, "you will drive me to something rash. Keep quiet, then."

Poulain heaved a sigh.

"There! there!" continued Chicot, "I was saying that having just been working under the eyes of these personages, and not having been noticed by them, it was you who pretended this. I was saying, my dear monsieur, that it would be a great advantage for you to have another illustrious personage — the King, for instance — notice you."

"The King?"

"His Majesty, yes, Monsieur Poulain; he is very ready, I assure you, to admire all work and to reward every effort."

"Ah! Monsieur Briquet, for pity's sake!"

"I repeat, dear Monsieur Poulain, that if you stir you are a dead man; keep calm, therefore, to avoid this disgrace."

"But what do you want of me, in Heaven's name?"

"Your welfare, nothing else; have I not told you that I am your friend?"

"Monsieur!" cried Nicholas Poulain in despair, "I do not know, truly, what wrong I am doing his Majesty, you, or any one else in the world!"

"Dear Monsieur Poulain, you will explain yourself to whom it may concern; that is not my affair. I have my ideas, you see, and I hold to them; these ideas are that the King would not approve of the fact that his lieutenant of the provostship, when he is carrying out his duties as overseer, obeys the gestures and indications of Monsieur de Mayneville; who knows, for that matter, if the King would not take it ill that his lieutenant of the provostship had omitted to state in his daily report that Madame de Montpensier and Monsieur de Mayneville entered his good city of Paris yesterday morning? Nothing but that, mark you, Monsieur Poulain, might embroil you with his Majesty."

"Monsieur Briquet, an omission is not a crime, and surely his Majesty is too enlightened" —

"Dear Monsieur Poulain, you imagine things; I see more clearly into this affair."

"What do you see?"

"A fine and convenient gallows" —

"Monsieur Briquet!"

"Listen then, the devil! — with a new rope, four soldiers on the four cardinal points, not a few Parisians around the gallows, and a certain lieutenant of the provostship of my acquaintance at the end of the rope."

Nicholas Poulain shook so that he made the whole hedge tremble.

"Monsieur!" cried he, clasping his hands.

"But I am your friend, dear Monsieur Poulain," continued Chicot, "and in this capacity of friend, here is some advice for you."

"Some advice?"

"Yes, very easy to follow, thank God! You will go from here, — from here, you understand, — and find" —

"And find" — interrupted Nicholas, full of agony, "and find whom?"

"Let me think a moment," said Chicot, "and find — Monsieur d'Épernon."

"Monsieur d'Épernon, the King's friend?"

"Exactly; you will take him aside."

"Monsieur d'Épernon?"

"Yes, and you will tell him all about the measuring of the road."

"Is this madness, monsieur?"

"It is wisdom, on the contrary, supreme wisdom."

"I do not understand."

"It is clear, nevertheless. If I denounce you purely and simply as the man who was measuring, or the man with the cuirasses, they will hang you; if, on the contrary, you carry this out with good grace, they will cover you with rewards and honors. You do not seem convinced! Well, that will give me the trouble of returning to the Louvre; but faith, I will go, notwithstanding; there is nothing I would not do for you."

And Nicholas Poulain heard the noise which Chicot made in moving the branches in order to rise.

"No, no," said he; "stay here; I will go."

"Very well! But you understand, dear Monsieur Poulain,

no subterfuges, for to-morrow I shall send a note to the King, whose intimate friend I have the honor to be, such as you see me, or rather such as you do not see me; so that although not until the day after to-morrow, you will be hanged just as high and more quickly."

"I will go, monsieur," said the terrified lieutenant; "but you strangely abuse"—

"I?"

"Oh!"

"Well, dear Monsieur Poulain, raise altars to me; you were a traitor five minutes ago. I make you the savior of your country. By the way, run quickly, dear Monsieur Poulain, for I am in great haste to leave here; yet I cannot do so until you have left. Hôtel d'Épernon; do not forget."

Nicholas Poulain rose and with the face of a desperate man shot like an arrow in the direction of the Porte Saint Antoine.

"Ah! it was time," said Chicot, "for there is some one coming out of the priory. But it is not my young Jacques. Well! well!" said Chicot, "who is this fellow, cut out as the architect of Alexander would have designed Mount Athos. *Ventre de biche!* he is a very big dog to accompany a poor cur like me!"

And seeing this emissary of the prior, Chicot hastened to the Croix Faubin, the place of rendezvous.

As he was forced to go by a roundabout road, the direct line had an advantage over him in rapidity, that is to say the giant monk, who went over the road with great strides, arrived first at the cross.

Chicot, moreover lost a little time, as he went along, in examining his man, whose physiognomy he did not recognize in the least.

In fact, the monk was a veritable Philistine.

In the haste he had made to reach Chicot, his Jacobin gown had not even been fastened, and through an opening his muscular limbs were seen, dressed up in the trunk-hose of a layman. His hood, which had fallen back, showed a head of hair over which the scissors of the priory had not yet passed.

Moreover, a certain expression other than religious contracted the deep corners of his mouth, and when he wished to pass from a smile to a laugh, he showed three teeth which seemed like palisades planted behind the rampart of his heavy lips.

Arms as long as those of Chicot, but thicker, shoulders

capable of raising the gates of Gaza, a great kitchen knife passed through the cord around his waist; such, with a bag rolled like a buckler across his breast, were the arms, offensive and defensive, of this Goliath of the Jacobins.

"He is decidedly ugly," said Chicot, "and if he does not bring me excellent news, with a head like that, I shall find that such a creature is totally useless on earth."

The monk, seeing Chicot approach, saluted him in almost a military fashion.

"What do you wish, my friend," said Chicot.

"You are Monsieur Robert Briquet?"

"In person."

"In that case, I have a letter for you from the reverend prior."

"Give it to me."

Chicot took the letter; it was couched in the following terms:

"*My dear friend: I have carefully reflected since our separation. It is impossible to let the lamb whom the Lord has entrusted to me go among the devouring wolves of the world. I mean to refer, you will understand, to our little Jacques Clément, who has just been received by the King, and who has perfectly acquitted himself of your message.*

"*Instead of Jacques, whose age is still tender, and who owes his services to the priory, I send you a good and worthy brother of our community; his manners are gentle and his disposition simple; I am sure you will be pleased with your travelling companion.*"

"Yes, yes," thought Chicot, casting a side glance at the monk, "count on that."

"*I add to this letter my benediction, which I regret I did not give you by word of mouth.*

"*Adieu, dear friend.*"

"That is fine handwriting!" said Chicot, when he had finished reading. "I would wager that the letter was written by the treasurer; he writes a superb hand."

"It was indeed Brother Borromée who wrote the letter," said the Goliath.

"Well, in that case, my friend," replied Chicot, smiling pleasantly at the big monk, "you must return to the priory."

"I?"

"Yes, and you will say to his reverence that I have changed my mind, and that I desire to travel alone."

"What! you will not take me, monsieur ?" said the monk, with a surprise which was not free from menace.

"No, my friend, no."

"And why not, if you please ?"

"Because I have to be economical; times are hard and you would eat enormously."

The giant showed his three defenses.

"Jacques eats as much as I do," said he.

"Yes, but Jacques is a monk," said Chicot.

"And what am I, then ?"

"You, my friend, are a foot-soldier or a gendarme, which fact, between you and me, might scandalize the Notre Dame to which I am sent."

"Why do you speak of foot-soldier and gendarme ?" replied the monk. "I am a Jacobin. Cannot my gown be recognized ?"

"It is not the cowl that makes the friar, my friend," replied Chicot; "but the knife makes the soldier. Say that to Brother Borromée, if you please."

And Chicot bowed to the giant, who made his way back to the priory, growling like a hunted dog.

As to our traveller, he let him who was to have been his companion disappear, and when he saw him swallowed up within the great door of the convent, he hid behind a hedge, took off his doublet, and put on the fine shirt of mail under his linen shirt.

His toilet completed, he cut across the fields to reach the road to Charenton.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE DE GUISES.

The evening of the day on which Chicot set out for Navarre, we again find in the great chamber of the Hôtel de Guise, into which, in the preceding pages, we have already more than once conducted our readers, we again find, we say, in the great chamber of the Hôtel de Guise, that short young man with the bright eyes whom we saw enter Paris riding behind Carmainges, and who was no other, as we already know, than the beautiful penitent of Dom Gorenflot.

This time she had taken no precaution to disguise either her person or her sex.

Madame de Montpensier, dressed in an elegant robe, with spreading collar, her hair glittering with star-shaped gems, as was the fashion of that time, stood in the embrasure of a window, impatiently waiting for some one who had been delayed in coming.

Darkness was beginning to gather; the duchess could only with great difficulty distinguish the door of the hôtel, on which her eyes were intently fixed.

At length a horse's hoofs were heard, and ten minutes later the voice of the usher mysteriously announced to the duchess Monsieur le Duc de Mayenne.

Madame de Montpensier rose and ran to her brother in such haste that she forgot to walk on the tip of her right foot, as was her habit when she did not wish to limp.

"Alone, brother," said she; "you are alone?"

"Yes, sister," said the duke, seating himself after having kissed the hand of the duchess.

"But Henry, where is Henry? Do you realize that every one expects him here?"

"Henry, my sister, has nothing further to do in Paris, while on the contrary he still has everything to do in the towns of Flanders and Picardy. Our work is slow and underground; we have work there; why should we leave this work to come to Paris, where everything is done?"

"Yes, but where everything will be undone if you do not hasten."

"Bah!"

"'Bah!' as much as you wish, brother; I tell you that the bourgeois are no longer satisfied with all these reasons; they want to see their Duke Henry; that is their wish, their great desire."

"They shall see him at the right time. Has not Mayneville explained all this to them?"

"Without doubt; but you know his voice is not worth what yours is."

"Let us come to the most pressing business, sister. And Salcède?"

"Dead."

"Without speaking?"

"Without breathing a word."

"Good. And the preparations for war?"

"Finished."

"Paris?"

"Divided into sixteen quarters."

"And each quarter has the chief we appointed?"

"Yes."

"Let us live in peace, then. *Pâque Dieu!* that is what I am going to say to our good bourgeois."

"They will not listen to you."

"Bah!"

"I tell you they are possessed."

"Sister, you are somewhat too much in the habit of judging the impatience of others by your own."

"Are you reproaching me seriously for this?"

"God forbid! but what my brother Henry says must be done. And my brother Henry does not wish us to hurry."

"What shall we do, then," asked the duchess, impatiently.

"Does anything require haste, sister?"

"Everything, if we wish it."

"Beginning with what, in your opinion?"

"By taking the King."

"That is your fixed idea. I do not say it is bad, if we can carry it out; but to plan and to do are not the same; remember how many times we have been disappointed already."

"Times are changed; the King no longer has any one to defend him."

"No, except the Swiss, the Scotch, and the French guards."

"Brother, when you wish, I myself will show him to you on the road, escorted merely by two lackeys."

"I have been told that a hundred times, and I have never seen it once."

"You will see it, then, if you will only stay three days in Paris."

"Another project!"

"A plan, you mean."

"Kindly communicate it to me, in that case."

"Oh! it is a woman's idea, and consequently it will make you laugh."

"God forbid that I should wound your pride as an inventor! Let us hear the plan."

"Are you making fun of me, Mayenne?"

"No, I am listening to you."

"Well! in four months" —

Just then the usher raised the curtain.

"Will it please your highnesses to receive Monsieur de Mayneville?" he asked.

"My accomplice," said the duchess; "let him enter."

Monsieur de Mayneville came in, and kissed the hand of the Duke de Mayenne.

"One word, my lord," said he; "I come from the Louvre."

"Well?" cried Mayenne and the duchess together.

"They suspect your arrival."

"How?"

"While I was speaking with the chief of the post of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois, two Gascons passed."

"Did you know them?"

"No; they were all newly gotten up. '*Cap de Bious!*' said one, 'you have on a doublet which is magnificent, but, if the opportunity arises, it will not be of as much use to you as your cuirass of yesterday.'

"'Bah! bah! solid as is Monsieur de Mayenne's sword,' said the other, 'I will wager that it will cut no deeper into this satin than it would into the cuirass.'

"Thereupon the Gascon poured forth bravadoes which showed that they knew you were near."

"And to whom did these Gascons belong?"

"I know nothing about them."

"And they withdrew?"

"Oh! not at all! They spoke in a loud voice; the name of your highness was heard. Some passers-by stopped and asked if you had really arrived. They were about to reply to the question, when suddenly a man approached the Gascon and touched him on the shoulder. Either I am greatly mistaken, my lord, or this man was De Loignac."

"Well?" asked the duchess.

"To a few words uttered in a low tone, the Gascon replied merely by a gesture of submission, and followed the man who had interrupted him."

"So that" —

"So that I was unable to hear more; but meanwhile, be careful."

"Did you not follow them?"

"Yes; but at a distance. I was afraid of being recognized

as a gentleman of your highness. They set out in the direction of the Louvre, and disappeared behind the Hôtel des Meubles. But after them a whole train of voices repeated, 'Mayenne! Mayenne!'"

"I have a very simple way of answering," said the duke.

"What is it?" said his sister.

"To go and pay my respects to the King this evening."

"Pay your respects to the King?"

"Certainly. I come to Paris; I bring him news of his good towns in Picardy; there is nothing in it to rouse comment."

"The idea is good," said De Mayneville.

"It is imprudent," said the duchess.

"It is indispensable, sister, if they they really suspect my arrival in Paris. It was, moreover, the opinion of our brother Henry that I should go booted to the Louvre, in order to present to the King the respects of the whole family. This duty once done, I am free, and I can receive whoever seems fit to me."

"The members of the committee, for instance; they expect you."

"I will receive them at the Hôtel Saint Denis, on my return from the Louvre," said Mayenne. "So, De Mayneville, have my horse brought to me, just as it is, without being rubbed down. You will come with me to the Louvre. You, sister, will wait for me, if you please."

"Here, brother?"

"No, at the Hôtel Saint Denis, where I have left my horses and carriages, and where they think I am sleeping. We shall be there in two hours."

CHAPTER XXVII.

AT THE LOUVRE.

On that day also it happened that the King came out of his cabinet and sent for Monsieur d'Épernon. It was about noon.

The duke hastened to obey, and presented himself before the King. He found his Majesty standing in an antechamber, gazing attentively at a Jacobin monk who was blushing and dropping his eyes under the searching look of the King.

The latter took D'Épernon aside.

"Look, duke," said he, pointing to the young man, "what a comical-looking monk is here!"

"What is your Majesty surprised at?" said D'Épernon. "I find him very ordinary looking, myself."

"Really?"

And the King began to reflect.

"What is your name?" said he to the monk.

"Brother Jacques, sire."

"You have no other name?"

"My family name, 'Clement.'"

"Brother Jacques Clement," repeated the King.

"Does not your Majesty find something strange in the name?" said the duke, laughing.

The King did not answer.

"You have performed your commission very well," said he to the monk, without taking his eyes from him.

"What commission, sire?" asked the duke with that boldness for which he was reproached, and which daily familiarity gave him.

"Nothing," said the King, "a little secret between myself and some one whom you do not know, or rather whom you no longer know."

"Really, sire," said D'Épernon, "you look at this child very strangely, and you embarrass him."

"Yes, that is true. I do not know why I cannot keep my eyes from him; it seems to me that I have already seen him, or that I shall see him. He has come to me in a dream, I believe. Well, what nonsense I am talking! Go, little monk, you have done your mission. We will send the letter to him who asks for it; be easy, D'Épernon!"

"Sire?"

"Have ten crowns given him."

"Thank you," said the monk.

"One would say that you said 'thank you' on the edge of your teeth," remarked D'Épernon, who did not understand how a monk could despise ten crowns.

"I did say 'thank you' that way," replied young Jacques, "because I would much prefer one of those beautiful Spanish knives hanging over there on the wall."

"What! you would not rather have money so that you could go and see the players at the fair Saint Laurent, or the rabbits in the Rue Sainte Marguerite?" demanded D'Épernon.

"I have taken the vows of poverty and chastity," replied Jacques.

"Give him one of those Spanish blades and let him go, La Valette," said the King.

The duke, like a parsimonious man, chose from among the knives the one which seemed to him the least costly, and handed it to the young monk.

It was a small Catalonian knife, with a broad blade, solidly set in a handle of beautiful carved horn.

Jacques took it, thoroughly delighted at possessing such a beautiful weapon, and withdrew.

When he was gone the duke again tried to question the King.

"Duke," interrupted the latter, "have you among your Forty-Five two or three men who understand riding?"

"A dozen at least, sire, and all will be horsemen in a month."

"Choose two of them, and send them to me at once."

The duke bowed, went out, and sent for De Loignac to come into the antechamber.

De Loignac appeared at the end of a few seconds.

"De Loignac," said the duke, "send me two good horsemen at once; they are to carry out a mission of his Majesty."

De Loignac quickly crossed the gallery and reached the building which hereafter we shall call the lodging of the Forty-Five. Opening the door, he called in the voice of a commander:

"Monsieur de Carmainges! Monsieur de Biran!"

"Monsieur de Biran has gone out," said the sentry.

"What! gone out without permission?"

"He is watching the quarter which my lord the Duke d'Épernon recommended to him this morning."

"Very good! Call Monsieur de Sainte Maline, then."

The two names resounded through the arches, and the two chosen men at once appeared.

"Gentlemen," said De Loignac, "follow me to Monsieur le Duc d'Épernon."

And he led them to the duke, who, in turn, dismissed De Loignac and conducted them to the King. Upon a sign from his Majesty, the duke retired, and the two young men remained.

It was the first time they had been in the presence of the King. Henry was very imposing in appearance.

Their emotion showed itself in different ways.

Sainte Maline had bright eyes, strained muscles, and a bristling mustache. Carmainges, pale but resolute, although less proud, did not dare to fix his eyes on Henry.

"You belong to my Forty-Five, gentlemen?" said the King.

"I have that honor, sire," replied Sainte Maline.

"And you, monsieur?"

"I thought that monsieur was answering for both of us, sire; that is why my reply was so slow in coming; but as to being in your Majesty's service, I am in it as much as any one in the world."

"Good, you will mount your horses and take the road to Tours; do you know it?"

"I will ask where it is," said Sainte Maline.

"I will find where it is," said Carmainges.

"In order to guide you the better, pass first through Charenton."

"Yes, sire."

"You will keep on until you meet a man travelling alone."

"Will your Majesty describe him to us?" asked Sainte Maline.

"A long sword at his side or on his back, long arms and legs."

"May we know his name, sire?" asked Ernauton de Carmainges, whose companion's example led him, in spite of etiquette, to question the King.

"He calls himself the Shade," said Henry.

"We will ask the name of every traveller we meet, sire."

"And we will search every inn."

"Once this man is met and recognized, you will give him this letter."

The two young men extended their hands at the same time.

The King paused, embarrassed for a moment.

"What is your name?" he asked the one.

"Ernauton de Carmainges," he replied.

"And yours?"

"René de Sainte Maline."

"Monsieur de Carmainges, you will carry the letter, and Monsieur de Sainte Maline will deliver it."

Ernauton took the precious charge, which he prepared to insert in his doublet.

Sainte Maline arrested his arm just as the letter was about to

disappear, and respectfully kissed the seal. Then he returned the letter to Ernauton.

This flattery made Henry III. smile.

"Well, well, gentlemen," said he, "I see that I shall be well served."

"Is this all, sire?" asked Ernauton.

"Yes, gentlemen; but a last recommendation."

The young men bowed and waited.

"This letter, gentlemen," said Henry, "is more precious than life. So do not lose it, but give it secretly to the Shade, who will return a receipt for it which you will bring back to me, and above all else, ride like men who are travelling on their own business. Now go."

The two young men left the royal cabinet, Ernauton filled with joy, Sainte Maline bursting with jealousy; one with fire in his eyes, the other with a hungry look which burned into the doublet of his companion.

Monsieur d'Épernon was waiting for them, and tried to question them.

"Monsieur le Duc," replied Ernauton, "the King has not authorized us to speak."

They went at once to the stables, where the King's groom gave them two travelling horses, strong and well equipped.

Monsieur d'Épernon would certainly have followed them to find out more had he not been informed, just as Carmainges and Sainte Maline left him, that a man wished to speak to him at once and at any cost.

"What man?" asked the duke, impatiently.

"The lieutenant of the provostship of the Isle of France."

"Well! *parfandious!*" cried he, "am I sheriff, provost, or captain of the night watch?"

"No, my lord; but you are a friend of the King," replied an humble voice at his left side. "I beg you, in this capacity, to listen to me."

The duke turned.

Near him, hat in hand, with head bent, was a poor solicitor whose face every instant assumed one of the colors of the rainbow.

"Who are you?" demanded the duke, roughly.

"Nicholas Poulain, at your service, my lord."

"You wish to speak to me?"

"I beg that favor."

"I have not the time."

"Not even to hear a secret, my lord?"

"I hear a hundred of them every day, monsieur; yours would be the hundred and first; it would be one too many."

"Even if it concerned his Majesty's life?" said Nicholas Poulain, leaning toward D'Épernon's ear.

"Oh! ah! I will hear you; come into my study."

Nicholas Poulain wiped his forehead, which was dripping with perspiration, and followed the duke.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE REVELATION.

In crossing his antechamber, Monsieur D'Épernon spoke to one of the gentlemen who stood there.

"What is your name, monsieur?" he asked of an unknown face.

"Pertinax de Montcrabeau, my lord," replied the gentleman.

"Well, Monsieur de Montcrabeau, take your stand outside my door, and let no one enter."

"Yes, Monsieur le Duc."

"No one, you understand."

"Perfectly."

And Monsieur Pertinax, who was sumptuously arrayed, and who looked fine in orange-colored hose and a blue satin doublet, obeyed D'Épernon's order. He leaned against the wall, and took his position with folded arms in front of the portière.

Nicholas Poulain followed the duke, who passed into his study. He saw the door open and close, then the portière was drawn, and he began to tremble in good earnest.

"Now for your conspiracy, monsieur," said the duke, dryly; "but for Heaven's sake, let it be a good one, for I have a number of pleasant things to attend to to-day, and if I waste my time listening to you, beware!"

"Well, Monsieur le Duc," said Nicholas Poulain, "it is simply a question of the most frightful of crimes."

"Well, let us hear the crime."

"Monsieur le Duc" —

"They are going to kill me, are they not?" interrupted D'Épernon, straightening himself like a Spartan. "Well, so be it! my life is God's and the King's; let them take it."

"It does not concern you, my lord."

"Ah! that surprises me."

"It concerns the King. They are going to abduct him, Monsieur le Duc."

"Oh! still that old question of abduction!" said D'Épernon with scorn.

"This time the affair is very serious, Monsieur le Duc, if appearances are to be believed."

"And what day are they planning to abduct his Majesty?"

"My lord, the first time his Majesty goes to Vincennes in his litter."

"How will they abduct him?"

"By killing his two attendants."

"And who will strike the blow?"

"Madame de Montpensier."

D'Épernon began to laugh.

"That poor duchess!" said he. "What things they attribute to her!"

"Fewer than she plans, my lord."

"And she is planning this at Soissons?"

"Madame la Duchess is in Paris."

"In Paris?"

"I can answer for it, my lord."

"You have seen her?"

"Yes."

"That is to say, you thought you saw her."

"I have had the honor of speaking to her."

"The honor?"

"I made a mistake, Monsieur le Duc, — the misfortune."

"But my dear lieutenant of the provostship, it is not the duchess who is to abduct the King?"

"Pardon me, my lord."

"She herself?"

"In person, with her confederates, of course."

"And where is she to station herself in order to preside at this abduction?"

"At a window of the Jacobin Priory, which is, as you know, on the road to Vincennes."

"What the devil are you telling me?"

"The truth, my lord. All measures are taken to stop the litter the moment it reaches the walls of the convent."

"And who has taken these measures?"

"Alas!"

"Finish, now; the devil!"

"I, my lord."

D'Épernon sprang back.

"You?" said he.

Poulain heaved a sigh.

"You are connected with it, you who denounce?" continued D'Épernon.

"My lord," said Poulain, "a good servant of the King should risk everything in his service."

"In fact, by Heaven, you risk the rope!"

"I prefer death to disgrace, or to the death of the King, that is why I have come."

"Those are laudable sentiments, monsieur, and you must have good reasons for them."

"I thought, my lord, that you were the friend of the King, that you would not betray me, and that you might turn to profit the revelation I have just made."

The duke looked at Poulain for some time, and carefully scrutinized the lineaments of his pale face.

"There must be something else still," said he; "the duchess, resolute as she is, would not dare to attempt such an undertaking alone."

"She is expecting her brother," replied Nicholas Poulain.

"Duke Henry!" cried D'Épernon, with the terror which one might feel at the approach of a lion.

"Not Duke Henry, my lord, but the Duke de Mayenne."

"Ah!" said D'Épernon, breathing again, "but no matter, we must look into all these fine plans."

"Without doubt, my lord," said Poulain, "and it is for this reason that I have hastened."

"If you have told the truth, monsieur lieutenant, you shall be rewarded."

"Why should I lie, my lord? What would be my reason, I who eat the King's bread? Do I, or do I not owe him my services? I will go to the King, then, I warn you, if you do not believe me, and I will die, if I must, to prove my words."

"No! *parfandious!* you will not go to the King; do you

hear, Monsieur Nicholas? and it is with me alone that you must discuss this affair."

"So be it, my lord; I said that only because you seemed to hesitate."

"No, I do not hesitate, and in the first place, here are a thousand crowns I owe you."

"My lord desires, then, that this be for himself alone?"

"Yes, I have ambition, zeal, and I will keep the secret for myself. You will yield it to me, will you not?"

"Yes, my lord."

"With guarantee that it is a real secret?"

"Oh! with every guarantee."

"A thousand crowns are yours, then, without counting the future."

"I have a family, my lord."

"Well! but a thousand crowns, *parfandious!*"

"And if it was known in Lorraine that I made such a revelation, every word that I uttered would cost me a pint of blood."

"Poor dear man!"

"It is necessary, in case of misfortune, that my family be able to live."

"Well?"

"Well! that is why I accept the thousand crowns."

"To the devil with your explanation! What difference does your motive for accepting them make to me, as long as you do not refuse them? The thousand crowns, then, are yours."

"Thank you, my lord."

Seeing the duke approach a coffer into which he put his hand, Poulain advanced behind him. But the duke contented himself with drawing out a little book in which he wrote in a large and frightful hand:

"Three thousand pounds to Monsieur Nicholas Poulain."

So that one did not know whether he had given the three thousand pounds or whether he owed them.

"It is just as though you had it," said he.

Poulain, who had advanced his arm and leg, drew them back, a movement which caused him to bow.

"So it is settled?" said the duke.

"What is settled, my lord?"

"You will continue to inform me?"

Poulain hesitated; it was the duties of spy which were imposed on him.

"Well!" said the duke, "has this supreme devotion already vanished?"

"No, my lord."

"I may count on you, then?"

Poulain made an effort.

"You may count on me," said he.

"And I alone am to know all this?"

"You alone, yes, my lord."

"Well, my friend, go; *parfandious!* let Monsieur de Mayenne look to himself."

He uttered these words as he raised the portière to let Poulain pass; then, when he had seen the latter cross the room and disappear, he went at once to the King.

The latter wearied with playing with his dogs, had turned to cup and ball.

D'Épernon assumed a busy, anxious look, which the King, preoccupied with so important a work, did not even notice.

But, as the duke remained obstinately silent, the King raised his head and looked at him an instant.

"Well!" said he, "what is the matter now, La Valette? Are you dead?"

"Would to Heaven, sire!" replied D'Épernon, "I did not see what I do see."

"What? my cup and ball?"

"Sire, in great dangers a subject may be alarmed for the safety of his master."

"Dangers again? The black devil take you, duke!"

And with remarkable dexterity the King caught the ball on the small end of his cup.

"You are ignorant, then, of what is taking place?" asked the duke.

"In faith! perhaps," said the King.

"Your most cruel enemies surround you at this moment, sire."

"Bah! who, then?"

"The Duchess of Montpensier, first."

"Ah! yes, that is true; she watched Salcède being quartered yesterday."

"How your Majesty says that!"

"What is it to me?"

"You knew it, then?"

"You see very well that I knew it, since I told you of it."

"But that Monsieur de Mayenne would arrive — did you know that too?"

"Since last evening."

"What! this secret" — said the duke, unpleasantly surprised.

"Are there any secrets for the King, my dear fellow?" said Henry, carelessly.

"But who could have informed you?"

"Do you not know that we princes have revelations?"

"Or a police."

"It is the same thing."

"Ah! your Majesty has your police, and you say nothing about it!" replied D'Épernon, hurt.

"By Heaven! who will love me, then, if I do not love myself?"

"You do me an injustice, sire."

"If you are zealous, my dear La Valette, which is a fine quality, you are slow, which is a bad fault; your news would have been very good at four o'clock yesterday, but to-day" —

"Well, sire, to-day?"

"It comes a little late, you will admit."

"It is still too soon, sire, since I do not find you disposed to listen to me," said D'Épernon.

"I? I have been listening to you for an hour."

"What! you are menaced, attacked; they lay snares for you, and you do not stir?"

"Why should I, since you have given me a guard, and since yesterday you pretended that my immortality was assured? You contract your brow; ah! but have your Forty-Five returned to Gascony, where they no longer are of use? Is it with these gentlemen as with mules? — the day they are tried they are all fire; when they are bought they balk?"

"Well, your Majesty shall see what they are."

"I shall not be sorry to do so; will it be soon, duke, that I shall see this?"

"Sooner than you think, perhaps, sire."

"Good! you are going to frighten me."

"You shall see, you shall see, sire. By the way, when are you going to the country?"

"To the forest?"

"Yes."

"Saturday."

"In three days, then?"

"In three days."

"That is all, sire."

D'Épernon bowed to the King and withdrew.

In the antechamber he found that he had forgotten to relieve Monsieur Pertinax from his duty; but Monsieur Pertinax had relieved himself.

CHAPTER XXIX.

TWO FRIENDS.

Now, if it is agreeable to the reader, we will follow the two young men whom the King, delighted to have his little secrets to himself, had sent as messengers to Chicot.

Scarcely were they in the saddles, when Ernauton and Sainte Maline, in order not to let one get ahead of the other, almost crushed each other in passing through the gates.

In fact as the two horses went forward, they rubbed the knees of the two riders one against the other.

Sainte Maline's face became purple, Ernauton's pale.

"You are hurting me, monsieur!" cried the former, when they had passed the gates; "do you want to crush me?"

"You are hurting me also," said Ernauton, "but I do not complain."

"You wish to give me a lesson, I presume?"

"I wish to give you nothing at all."

"Ah!" said Sainte Maline, urging forward his horse, in order to speak nearer to his companion, "repeat those words to me."

"Why?"

"Because I do not understand you."

"You are seeking a quarrel, are you not?" said Ernauton, phlegmatically; "so much the worse for you!"

"And for what purpose should I seek a quarrel with you? Do I know you?" replied Sainte Maline, scornfully.

"You know me perfectly well, monsieur," said Ernauton. "In the first place, because in the town we come from, my house is two leagues from yours, and because, being of ancient

stock, I am well known in the country; then, because you are furious at seeing me in Paris, when you thought that you alone were summoned; finally, because the King gave me his letter to carry."

"Well! so be it!" cried Sainte Maline, white with rage. "I accept all that as truth. But one thing results from it" —

"What?"

"That I do not like to be near you."

"Go away if you wish; by Heaven! I am not detaining you."

"You act as though you did not understand me."

"On the contrary, monsieur, I understand you perfectly. You would rather like to take the letter and carry it yourself; unfortunately, it would be necessary to kill me for that."

"Who told you that I did not wish to do so?"

"To wish and to do are two very different things."

"Just descend with me to the border of the waters, and you shall see that with me to wish and to do are one and the same."

"My dear monsieur, when the King gives me a letter to carry" —

"Well?"

"Well! I carry it."

"I will take it from you by force, coxcomb that you are!"

"You will not put me, I trust, to the necessity of breaking your head, like that of a mad dog?"

"You?"

"Without doubt; I have a large pistol, and you have none."

"Ah! I will pay you for that!" said Sainte Maline, making his horse plunge.

"I trust so, after my commission is carried out."

"*Schelm!*"

"For the present be careful how you act, I beg you, Monsieur de Sainte Maline; for we have the honor of belonging to the King, and we should give a bad idea of the house by stirring up the people. And then think what a triumph for the enemies of his Majesty, in seeing discord among the defenders of the throne!"

Sainte Maline bit his fingers; the blood flowed beneath his furious teeth.

"There! there! monsieur," said Ernauton, "keep your hands to hold the sword, when we shall have come to that."

"Oh, I shall burst!" cried Sainte Maline.

"In that case the work will be done for me," said Ernauton.

We do not know to what point the ever-increasing fury of Sainte Maline might have reached, when suddenly Ernauton, crossing the Rue Saint Antoine, near Saint Paul, saw a litter, gave a cry of surprise, and halted to look at a woman half veiled.

"My page of yesterday!" he murmured.

The lady did not seem to recognize him, but throwing herself back in her litter, passed without moving a muscle.

"By Heaven! you make me wait for you, I think," said Sainte Maline, "and in order to stare at a woman!"

"I beg your pardon, monsieur," said Ernauton, resuming his course.

The young men, from that moment, followed at a good trot the Rue of the Faubourg Saint Marceau; they spoke no more, not even to quarrel.

Sainte Maline seemed calm enough outwardly, but in reality every muscle of his body still quivered with anger.

Besides, he had recognized, and this discovery had in no wise softened him, as one may easily understand, he had recognized that, good horseman as he was, he could not in the present instance even follow Ernauton, his horse being greatly inferior to that of his companion, and already wet with perspiration although he had ridden at a moderate pace.

This thought engrossed him; also, in order to make himself positively certain of what his mount could do, he began to torment him with switch and spur.

This persistence led to a quarrel between him and his horse.

This took place in the environs of the Bièvre.

The beast did not put himself to the expense of talking, as Ernauton had done; but, remembering his origin (he was Norman), he brought an action against his rider which the latter lost.

He started out by swerving to one side, then he reared, leaped forward, and started toward the Bièvre, where he rid himself of his rider by rolling with him as far as the river, where they separated.

One might have heard the curses of Sainte Maline a mile away, although they were partly stifled by the water.

When he had succeeded in getting on to his feet again, his eyes were starting from his head, and a few drops of blood, coming from his bruised forehead, trickled down his face.

Sainte Maline glanced around him; his horse had already ascended the hill, and nothing was to be seen but his buttocks, which showed that his head was already set in the direction of the Louvre.

Bruised as he was, covered with mud, drenched to the skin, and all bloody and sore, Sainte Maline understood the impossibility of catching his beast; even to attempt it was absurd.

It was then that the words he had spoken to Ernauton came back to his mind; if he had not been willing to wait one second for his companion in the Rue Sainte Maline, why should his companion have the kindness to wait for him one or two hours on the road?

This reflection brought Sainte Maline from anger to the most violent despair, especially when from the depths of his situation he saw the silent Ernauton spurring forward his horse, and turning aside to some road which no doubt he thought the shortest. With really irascible men, the culminating point of anger is a passing act of folly.

Some reach only delirium.

Others, the total prostration of strength and intellect.

Sainte Maline mechanically drew out his dagger; for an instant he had an idea of plunging it into his breast up to the guard.

What he suffered in that moment none could say, not even himself.

One dies in such a crisis, or, if one conquers it, one grows ten years older.

He climbed up the bank of the river again, helping himself by his hands and knees, until he reached the summit; once there, his wandering eye looked up and down the road; nothing was to be seen.

To the right, Ernauton had disappeared; in the distance his own horse had disappeared also.

While Sainte Maline was revolving in his exasperated mind a thousand sinister thoughts against others as well as himself, the gallop of a horse fell on his ear, and he saw a horse and rider issuing from the road to the right, which was the one chosen by Ernauton.

The rider was leading another horse.

It was the result of Monsieur de Carmainges' chase; he had cut across to the right, realizing that to pursue a horse was to double his activity by fright.

He had therefore made a detour, and cut off the passage of the Norman, by waiting for him across a narrow street.

At sight of this, the heart of Sainte Maline overflowed with joy; he felt a thrill of effusion and gratitude which gave a kindly expression to his face, then suddenly his features clouded; he understood all the superiority of Ernauton over himself, for he admitted to himself that, in his companion's place, he would not even have thought of doing as he had done. The nobleness of the act overwhelmed him; he felt it in order to measure it, and suffer from it. He stammered a few words of thanks to which Ernauton paid no attention, seized furiously the bridle of his horse, and, in spite of his condition, sprang into the saddle.

Ernauton, without uttering a single word, had gone on ahead of him, caressing his own horse. Sainte Maline, as we have said, was an excellent rider. The accident of which he had been the victim was a surprise; at the end of an instant's struggle in which this time he had the advantage, he became master of his beast, and started him on a trot.

"Thank you, monsieur," said he a second time to Ernauton, after having a hundred times consulted his pride and good manners.

Ernauton contented himself on his part with bowing, and touching his hat with his hand. The road seemed long to Sainte Maline.

Towards half-past two or thereabouts, they perceived a man walking along, followed by a dog; he was tall, with a sword at his side; it was not Chicot, but he had arms and legs worthy of him.

Sainte Maline, still completely covered with mud, could not contain himself; he saw that Ernauton was passing by without paying the least attention to this man.

The idea of finding his companion at fault passed like an evil thought through the mind of the Gascon; he approached the man and addressed him:

"Traveller," said he, "are you not expecting something?"

The traveller looked at Sainte Maline, whose appearance at that moment, it must be admitted, was not prepossessing.

With features still distorted from his recent anger, some partly dried mud on his clothes and partly dried blood on his cheeks, his great black frowning eyebrows, a nervous hand extended towards him, with a threatening rather than a

questioning gesture, — all this seemed foreboding to the pedestrian.

"If I expected anything," said he, "it is not anybody ; and if I expected anybody, that anybody is not you, you may be sure."

"You are very impolite, my master!" said Sainte Maline, delighted at last at having found an opportunity of giving rein to his anger, and furious, besides, at seeing, by having made the mistake, that he had given a new triumph to his adversary.

As he spoke he raised his hand, which held the whip, to strike the traveller; but the latter raised his stick and dealt a blow on Sainte Maline's shoulder; then he whistled to his dog, who sprang at the horse's withers and at the man's thigh, and took from each a strip of flesh and a bit of cloth.

The horse, irritated by the pain, sprang forward a second time, it is true, and without Sainte Maline's being able to restrain him, but in spite of every effort on the part of the horse, the rider kept his seat.

Thus carried away he sped by Ernauton, who saw him pass without even smiling at his mishap.

When he had succeeded in calming his horse, when Monsieur de Carmainges had rejoined him, his pride began, not to diminish, but to lead him to a settlement.

"Well! well!" said he, forcing himself to smile, "this is my unlucky day, it seems. But the man very much resembled the description his Majesty gave us of the one we are looking for."

Ernauton was silent.

"I am speaking to you, monsieur," said Sainte Maline, exasperated at this indifference, which he rightly regarded as a proof of scorn, and which he wished to bring to an end by some definite clap, should it cost him his life, "I am speaking to you. Do you not hear ? "

"The man his Majesty described to us," replied Ernauton, "had no stick and no dog."

"That is true," replied Sainte Maline, "and had I reflected I should have had one blow the less on my shoulder and two teeth marks less on my thigh; it is good to be careful and calm, I see."

Ernauton did not reply, but rising in his stirrups and placing his hand over his eyes for a screen :

"There," said he, "is the man we are looking for, and who is expecting us."

"Plague on it! monsieur," said Sainte Maline, in a hollow voice, jealous of this new advantage of his companion, "you have good eyesight. I can distinguish nothing but a black speck, and scarcely that."

Ernauton, without replying, continued to advance; soon Sainte Maline, in turn, could see and recognize the man described by the King. An evil impulse seized him; he urged forward his horse in order to arrive first.

Ernauton had expected this, and looked at him without a threat and without apparent intention; this glance brought Sainte Maline back to himself, and he walked his horse.

CHAPTER XXX.

SAINTE MALINE.

Ernauton was not mistaken; the man pointed out was indeed Chicot.

He, on his part, had good eyes and ears; he had seen and heard the horsemen from afar.

He suspected that they were coming to him, so he waited for them.

When there was no further doubt in this respect, and when he saw that the riders were coming towards him, he placed his hand without affectation on the handle of his sword, as if to assume a noble attitude.

Ernauton and Sainte Maline looked at each other an instant, both silent.

"It is for you to speak, monsieur, if you really wish it," said Ernauton, bowing to his adversary; for under these circumstances, the word "adversary" is more suitable than "companion."

Sainte Maline felt suffocated; his surprise at this courtesy choked him; he replied merely by bowing his head.

Ernauton saw that he remained silent, and therefore spoke.

"Monsieur," said he to Chicot, "monsieur and I are your servants."

Chicot bowed with his most gracious smile.

"Would it be indiscreet," continued the young man, "to ask you your name?"

"I am called the Shade, monsieur," replied Chicot.

"You are expecting something?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"You will be so good, will you not, as to tell us what you expect?"

"I am expecting a letter."

"You understand our curiosity, monsieur, and there is nothing in it to offend you."

Chicot still bowed, with a smile more and more gracious.

"From what quarter do you expect this letter?" continued Ernauton.

"From the Louvre."

"Sealed with what seal?"

"With the royal seal."

Ernauton put his hand to his breast.

"You would recognize the letter, no doubt?" said he.

"Yes; if I saw it."

Ernauton drew the letter from his breast.

"That is it," said Chicot, "and as greater security, you know, do you not, that I am to give you something in return?"

"A receipt?"

"That is it."

"Monsieur," replied Ernauton, "I was charged by the King to carry this letter to you; but it is this gentleman who was appointed to hand it to you."

And he extended the letter to Sainte Maline, who took it and gave it into Chicot's hands.

"Thank you, gentlemen," said the latter.

"You see," added Ernauton, "that we have faithfully fulfilled our mission. There is no one on the road; no one therefore has seen us speak to you or give you the letter."

"That is so, monsieur. I recognize the fact, and I will testify to it, if necessary. Now it is my turn."

"The receipt," said both the young men.

"To which of you must I give it?"

"The King did not say!" cried Sainte Maline, looking at his companion threateningly.

"Make two receipts, monsieur," said Ernauton, "and give one to each of us; it is far from here to the Louvre, and some accident may happen on the way to monsieur or to me."

As he spoke, Ernauton's eyes flashed fire.

"You are a wise man, monsieur," said Chicot to Ernauton.

And he drew some tablets from his pocket, tore two leaves from them, and wrote on each:

"Received from the hands of Monsieur René de Sainte Maline, the letter brought by Monsieur Ernauton de Carmainges.

"THE SHADE."

"Adieu, monsieur," said Sainte Maline, taking his receipt.

"Adieu, monsieur, and a pleasant journey!" added Ernauton. "Have you anything else to send to the Louvre?"

"Absolutely nothing, gentlemen; many thanks," said Chicot.

Ernauton and Sainte Maline turned the heads of their horses toward Paris, and Chicot departed at a gait which the best mule would have envied.

When Chicot had disappeared, Ernauton, who had gone scarcely a hundred feet, pulled up his horse, and turned to Sainte Maline:

"Now, monsieur," said he, dismounting, "if you are ready?"

"Why so, monsieur?" said Sainte Maline in astonishment.

"Our mission is accomplished, and we have something to settle. The place seems to me excellent for a conversation like ours."

"As you will, monsieur," said Sainte Maline, dismounting, as his companion had already done.

Ernauton drew near and said to him:

"You know, monsieur, that without provocation on my part and without consideration on yours, without any cause, in fact, you have grievously offended me during the whole journey. More than this; you wished to compel me to fight at an inopportune moment, and I refused. But now the time is ripe, and I am your man."

Sainte Maline listened to these words with a gloomy face, and with frowning brows; but, strange fact, Sainte Maline was no longer filled with the anger which had driven him beyond all bounds! Sainte Maline no longer wished to fight; reflection had brought back common sense; he realized all the inferiority of his position.

"Monsieur," he replied, after an instant's silence, "when I insulted you, you replied by kindness; I do not now know how to use the language to you that I did a while ago."

Ernauton frowned.

"No, monsieur, but you still think what you said then."

"How do you know that?"

"Because all your words were dictated by hatred and envy, and because, in the two hours since you uttered them, this hatred and envy could not have been extinguished in your heart."

Sainte Maline blushed, but did not answer.

Ernauton waited an instant, and then said:

"If the King preferred me to you, it was because my face pleased him better than yours; if I was not hurled into the Bièvre, it was because I am a better rider than you; if I did not accept your challenge at the moment when it pleased you to make it, it was because I had more prudence; if I was not bitten by the man's dog, it was because I had more sagacity: in short, if I challenge you now to give me satisfaction and to fight, it is because I have more true honor, and, take care, if you hesitate, I shall say more courage."

Sainte Maline shivered, and his eyes shot fire; all the evil passions which Ernauton had mentioned had one by one left their mark on his livid face; at the last word of the young man he drew his sword in a towering rage.

Ernauton already had his weapon in his hand.

"Stay, monsieur," said Sainte Maline, "take back the last word you have spoken; it is too much, you will admit, you who know me perfectly, since, as you said, we live two leagues from each other. Take it back; you ought to be satisfied with my humiliation; do not dishonor me."

"Monsieur," said Ernauton, "as I never get angry, I never say anything except what I mean; consequently I shall take nothing at all back. I am sensitive myself, also, and new at court; therefore, I do not wish to have to blush every time I meet you. A stroke of the sword, if you please, monsieur; it is for my satisfaction as much as for yours."

"Oh, monsieur! I have fought eleven times," said Sainte Maline, with a gloomy smile, "and of my eleven adversaries two are dead. You know that, I presume."

"And I, monsieur, have never fought," replied Ernauton, "for an opportunity has never presented itself; I find one to my liking coming to me without my seeking, and I am going to make the most of it. I await your pleasure, monsieur."

"Hold," said Sainte Maline, shaking his head, "we are

countrymen, we are in the service of the King; let us not quarrel any more; I look upon you as a brave man, I would even offer you my hand, if that were not almost impossible. What would you have? I show myself to you as I am, embittered to the depths of my heart; but it is not my fault. I am envious, what would you have me do? Nature created me on an evil day. Monsieur de Chalabre, Monsieur de Montcrabeau, or Monsieur de Pincornay would not have been angry at me; it is your superiority which causes my vexation; console yourself for it, since my envy cannot injure you, and to my great regret your superiority remains. So we will stop here, shall we not, monsieur? I should suffer too much, in truth, if you were to tell of the cause of our quarrel."

"No one shall know of our quarrel, monsieur."

"No one?"

"No, monsieur. In the meantime, if we fight I will kill you or be killed myself. I am not one of those who hold life lightly; on the contrary, I cling to it. I am twenty-three years old; of a good name; I am not entirely poor; I trust in myself and in the future, and you may be sure I will defend myself like a lion."

"Well! it is entirely different with me, monsieur: I am already thirty years old and am disgusted with life, for I believe neither in the future nor in myself; but thoroughly disgusted with life, thoroughly incredulous of happiness as I am, I prefer not to fight with you."

"Then you will apologize?" said Ernauton.

"No, I have done and said enough. If you are not satisfied, so much the better; in that case you will cease to be my superior."

"I must remind you, monsieur, that since both are Gascons, we cannot end a quarrel thus without exposing ourselves to laughter."

"That is exactly what I expect," said Sainte Maline.

"You expect?"

"A laugh. Oh! how happy I shall be when that happens."

"You refuse, then, to fight?"

"I do not wish to fight with you, be it understood."

"After having provoked me?"

"I admit it."

"But, in short, monsieur, if I lose patience and attack you?" Sainte Maline wrung his hands convulsively.

"In that case," said he; "so much the better; I shall hurl my sword ten feet away."

"Take care, monsieur, for in that case I should not strike you with the point."

"Good, for then I should have cause to hate you, and I should hate you mortally; then some day, a day of weakness on your part, I should catch you as you have just done me, and in despair I would kill you."

Ernauton returned his sword to its sheath.

"You are a strange man," said he, "and I pity you from the depths of my heart."

"You pity me?"

"Yes, for you must suffer horribly."

"Horribly."

"You never love?"

"Never."

"But you have passions, at least?"

"One only."

"Jealousy, you told me."

"Yes, which makes me have all to an indescribable degree of shame and wretchedness: I adore a woman the moment she loves another; I love gold when it is another's hand that touches it; I am proud always by comparison; I drink to warm my anger, to make it sharp when it is not chronic, that is, to make it burst and burn like a thunder-bolt. Oh! yes, yes, you have said it, Monsieur de Carmainges, I am wretched."

"You have never tried to become good?" asked Ernauton.

"I have not succeeded."

"What do you hope for? What do you expect to do, then?"

"What does the poisonous plant do? It has flowers like the others, and some people know how to put them to good use. What do the bear and the bird of prey do? They bite; but certain breeders know how to train them for the chase; that is what I am, and what I shall probably be in the hands of Monsieur d'Épernon and Monsieur de Loignac, until the day when they shall say: This plant is harmful, let us pull it up; this beast is mad, let us kill it."

Ernauton became somewhat calm.

Sainte Maline was no longer an object of anger for him, but of study; he felt almost pity for this man whom circumstances had led to make such singular confessions.

"A great fortune — and having great qualities, you could make one — would cure you," said he; "develop yourself in the direction of your instincts, Monsieur de Sainte Maline, and you will succeed in war or intrigue; then, being able to dominate, you will hate less."

"As high as I might rise, as deeply as I might take root, there would always be greater fortunes above me, which would wound me; below me, sardonic laughter, which would rend my ears."

"I pity you," repeated Ernauton. And this was all.

Ernauton went to his horse, which he had tied to a tree, unfastened him, and sprang into the saddle.

Sainte Maline had not dropped the bridle of his horse.

Both set out on the way back to Paris, the one silent and gloomy from what he had heard, the other from what he had said. Suddenly Ernauton extended his hand to Sainte Maline.

"Should you like me to try and cure you?" said he. "Come!"

"Not another word, monsieur," said Sainte Maline; "no, do not attempt that, you would fail in it. Hate me, on the contrary, and this will be a reason for my admiring you."

"Again I pity you, monsieur," said Ernauton.

One hour later the two horsemen entered the Louvre, and set out towards the lodging of the Forty-Five.

The King had gone out, and was not to return until evening.

CHAPTER XXXI.

HOW MONSIEUR DE LOIGNAC MADE A SPEECH TO THE FORTY-FIVE.

Each of the young men took his stand at the window of his little lodge, to watch for the return of the King.

Each of them settled himself there with very different thoughts:

Sainte Maline full of hatred, full of shame, full of ambition, with frowning brow, and burning heart.

Ernauton already forgetful of what had taken place, absorbed in one thing, that is, who that woman could be who had

entered Paris in the costume of a page, and whom he had seen again in a sumptuous litter.

There was in this ample material for reflection for a heart more disposed to amorous adventures than to the calculations of ambition.

So Ernauton, little by little, lost himself in his reflections, and so deeply that it was only on raising his head that he perceived that Sainte Maline was no longer there.

A thought flashed through his mind.

Less absorbed than himself, Sainte Maline had watched for the return of the King; the King had returned, and Sainte Maline was with him.

He rose hastily, crossed the gallery, and reached the King's apartments just as Sainte Maline was leaving them.

"See," said the latter, radiant, to Ernauton, "see what the King has given me."

And he showed him a gold chain.

"I congratulate you, monsieur," said Ernauton, without betraying the least emotion in his tone. And he in turn entered the King's room.

Sainte Maline expected some show of jealousy on the part of Monsieur de Carmainges. He stood, therefore, stupefied at this calmness, waiting for Ernauton to come out.

Ernauton remained about ten minutes with Henry; these ten minutes were centuries for Sainte Maline.

At last he came out. Sainte Maline was in the same place; with a rapid glance he looked at his companion, then his heart dilated. Ernauton brought nothing, at least nothing visible.

"And you?" asked Sainte Maline, following out his thought; "what did the King give you, monsieur?"

"His hand to kiss," replied Ernauton.

Sainte Maline clinched his chain between his hands so that he broke a link.

Both set out toward the lodging. Just as they entered the apartment the trumpet sounded; at this signal each of the Forty-Five left his lodging like bees from their hives.

Each one wondered what new thing had happened, while taking advantage of this instant of general reunion to admire the change which had taken place in the person and the clothes of his companions.

The most of them were arrayed with great luxury, in bad

taste, perhaps, but the elegance of which was compensated for by its magnificence.

Moreover, they had what had been sought for by D'Épernon, who was a rather clever politician, although a poor soldier; some had youth, some vigor, others experience, and this made up among all for at least one defect.

In short, they resembled a corps of officers in citizens' clothing, the military cut being, with very few exceptions, what they had most desired.

Thus, with long swords, clanking spurs, mustaches curled to the point of heart-breaking, boots and gloves of buck or leather; the whole well gilded, well pomaded, or well be-ribboned *for appearance's sake*, as they said at that time, such was the instinctive bearing adopted by the greater number.

The most discreet were recognized by their sombre colors; the most penurious by solid stuffs; the most frisky by laces and rose-colored or white satin.

Perducas de Pincornay had found at some Jew's a brass chain, as thick as a prison chain.

Pertinax de Montcrabeau wore only bows and embroideries; he had bought his costume from a merchant in the Rue des Haudriettes, who had cared for a gentleman wounded by robbers.

The gentleman had ordered other clothes brought from his home, and, grateful for the kindness received, he had left the merchant his coat. Although somewhat soiled with mud and blood, the merchant had had it cleaned, and it had turned out very presentable. Two holes remained, it is true, marks of the dagger, but Pertinax had these two places embroidered over in gold; so a defect was replaced by an ornament.

Eustache de Miradoux did not shine; he had been obliged to dress Lardille, Militor, and the two children.

Lardille had chosen a costume as rich as the sumptuary laws permitted women to wear at that time; Militor was covered with velvet and damask, ornamented with a silver chain, a plumed toque, and embroidered hose; so that there remained to poor Eustache a sum barely sufficient to keep him from appearing in rags. Monsieur de Chalabre had kept his iron-gray doublet, which a tailor had cleaned and re-lined. Some bands of velvet, skilfully stitched on here and there, gave a new set-off to this garment that could not be worn out.

Monsieur de Chalabre pretended that he had asked nothing better than to change the doublet, but that in spite of the most

minute search, it had been impossible to find better made or more useful cloth.

For the rest, he had gone to the expense of poppy-colored breeches, boots, cloak, and hat — the whole harmonious to the eye, as is always the case in the clothes of the penurious.

As to his arms, they were irreproachable; old soldier that he was, he had known how to find an excellent Spanish sword, a dagger of good make, and a perfect gorget. This was a saving of plaited collars and ruffs.

These gentlemen were admiring one another, therefore, when Monsieur De Loignac entered with frowning brow.

He had a circle formed, and took his stand in the middle of this circle with a countenance which announced nothing agreeable. It is useless to say that all eyes were fixed on the chief.

"Gentlemen," said he, "are you all here?"

"All!" replied forty-five voices in unison, which was full of promise for manœuvres to come.

"Gentlemen," continued De Loignac, "you have been sent here to serve as special guard for the King; it is an honorary title, but it demands a great deal."

De Loignac made a pause which was filled by a gentle murmur of satisfaction.

"But some of you seem to me not to have thoroughly understood your duties. I am going to recall them to you."

Each one listened; it was evident that they were anxious to know their duties, if not eager to fulfil them.

"You must not imagine, gentlemen, that the King enrolls you and pays you in order for you to act like fops, and to give here and there, at your caprice, bites and scratches; discipline is necessary, although it remains a secret, and you are a gathering of gentlemen who ought to be the most obedient and the most devoted in the kingdom."

The company did not breathe; in fact, it was easy to understand from the seriousness of the peroration that the conclusion would be serious.

"From to-day you will live in the intimacy of the Louvre, that is, in the very laboratory of the government: if you do not take part in all the deliberations, you will often be chosen to execute their purport; you are, therefore, like those officers who carry in themselves not only the responsibility of a secret, but the virtue of the executive power."

A second murmur of satisfaction ran along the ranks of the

Gascons; heads were seen to straighten themselves as if pride had raised these men several inches.

"Suppose, now," continued De Loignac, "that one of these officers, in whom sometimes reposes the safety of the state or the tranquillity of the crown, suppose, I say, that an officer betrays the secrets of the council or that a soldier charged with an order does not carry it out, you know he suffers death?"

"No doubt," replied several voices.

"Well! gentlemen," continued De Loignac in a terrible tone, "even to-day a measure of the King has been betrayed, and perhaps may have rendered impossible a measure which his Majesty wished to carry out."

Terror began to take the place of pride and admiration; the Forty-Five looked at one another in distrust and anxiety.

"Two of you gentlemen have been surprised on the street cackling like two old women and letting fall words so serious that each one of them may now strike a man and kill him."

Sainte Maline at once advanced to Monsieur de Loignac, and said to him:

"Monsieur, I believe I have the honor of speaking to you in the name of my comrades; it is necessary that you no longer let suspicion hover over all the servants of the King; speak quickly, if you please, that we may know how it is with us, and that the good may not be confounded with the bad."

"That is easy," replied De Loignac.

The attention increased.

"The King has received word to-day that one of his enemies, one of those very ones whom you are called on to fight, has arrived in Paris to brave him or conspire against him. The name of this enemy was uttered secretly, but was overheard by a sentinel, that is, by a man who should have been regarded as a wall, and who, like it, should have been deaf, mute, and immovable; but this same man, in the street, repeated the name of this enemy of the King with boasting and bragging which attracted the attention of the passers-by and caused a sort of commotion; I know it, for I was walking along the same road as this man, and heard everything with my own ears. I placed my hand on his shoulder to stop him, for at the rate he was going, with a few words more he would have compromised so many sacred interests that I should have been forced to plunge my dagger into him on the spot, if he had not become silent at my first warning."

At that moment Pertinax de Montcrabeau and Perducas de Pincornay turned pale and fell back upon each other almost fainting. Montcrabeau, swaying from side to side, strove to stammer some excuses.

As soon as the guilty ones were exposed from their actions, all eyes were turned towards them.

"Nothing can justify you, monsieur," said De Loignac to Montcrabeau; "if you were drunk, you should be punished for having drank; if you were only proud and boastful, you should still be punished."

There was a terrible silence.

Monsieur de Loignac, in beginning, it will be remembered, had announced a punishment which promised serious results.

"Consequently," continued De Loignac, "Monsieur de Montcrabeau, and you also, Monsieur de Pincornay, must be punished."

"Pardon, monsieur," replied Pertinax; "but we come from the provinces, we are new at court, and we are ignorant of the art of living in the midst of politics."

"This honor of being in his Majesty's service should not be accepted without weighing the duties of this service."

"We will in future be as mute as sepulchres; we swear it."

"All that is good, gentlemen; but can you repair to-morrow the wrong you have done to-day?"

"We will try."

"Impossible, I tell you, impossible!"

"But this once, monsieur, pardon us."

"You live," went on De Loignac, without directly replying to the prayer of the two culprits, "in apparent freedom, which I wish to repress by strict discipline. Do you thoroughly understand this, gentlemen? Those who find the conditions hard may leave; I shall not be embarrassed for volunteers to take their places."

No one answered, but many brows contracted.

"Consequently, gentlemen," continued De Loignac, "it is right that you should be forewarned of this: justice will be carried out among us secretly, expeditiously, without writing, without trial; traitors will be punished by death, and at once. There are all sorts of pretences for this, and no one will find anything in it to find fault with. Suppose, for instance, that Monsieur de Montcrabeau and Monsieur de Pincornay, instead of talking together in a friendly way in the street of things

which they should have forgotten, have had a discussion concerning things which they had the right to remember; well, might not this discussion have led to a duel between Monsieur de Pincornay and Monsieur Montcrabeau? In a duel it sometimes happens that one lunges and is run through at the same time; the day after the dispute these two gentlemen are found dead at the Pré-aux-Clercs, as Messieurs de Quélus, de Schomberg, and de Maugiron were found dead at the Tournelles; the affair rouses the interest that a duel should, and that is all. I shall therefore order killed — you understand, do you not, gentlemen? — I shall therefore order killed, by a duel or otherwise, whoever betrays the secret of the King."

Montcrabeau fainted dead away, and leaned upon his companion, whose pallor became more and more livid and whose teeth were clinched ready to break.

"I shall have," went on De Loignac, "for less grave faults, less serious punishment, — the prison, for instance, — and I shall use it when it will more severely punish the culprit than deprive the King. To-day I spare the life of Monsieur de Montcrabeau, who has spoken, and Monsieur de Pincornay, who has listened; I pardon them, I say, because they may have made a mistake and because they were ignorant; I will not punish them with the prison because I may have need of them this evening or to-morrow; consequently I will keep the third punishment for them, which I mean to use against delinquents, — a fine."

At this word "fine" the face of Monsieur de Chalabre grew as long as a martin's.

"You have received a thousand pounds, gentlemen; you will return a hundred of them, and this money will be used by me to reward, according to their merits, those whom I have no cause to reproach."

"A hundred pounds!" murmured Pincornay; "but *Cap de Bious!* I no longer have them. I have spent them for my clothes."

"You can sell your chain," said De Loignac.

"I shall be very glad to give it up for the service of the King," replied Pincornay.

"No, monsieur; the King does not purchase the belongings of his subjects in order to pay their fines; sell it yourself, and pay yourself. I have a word to add," continued De Loignac. "I have noticed various kinds of irritation among different members of this company; every time that a difference arises I

want it submitted to me, and I alone shall have the right to judge of the seriousness of the trouble and to order a duel, if I find a duel necessary. One is often killed in duels in these days; it is the fashion, and I do not want my company, in order to follow the fashion, to be constantly depleted and inadequate. The first duel, the first challenge which takes place without my approval will be punished with rigorous imprisonment, a very heavy fine, or even with a severer punishment still if the case does great injury to the service. Let those who can apply these orders to themselves do so. Now go, gentlemen. By the way, fifteen of you will station yourselves this evening at the foot of his Majesty's staircase while he receives, and at the first sign you will scatter, if need be, to the antechambers; fifteen will stand outside, without ostensible purpose, and mingle in the train of those who come to the Louvre; lastly, the fifteen others will remain in the lodgings."

"Monsieur," said Sainte Maline, approaching, "permit me not to offer a suggestion, God forbid! but to ask for an explanation; every good troop needs to be well commanded. How shall we act in unison if we have no chief?"

"And what am I, then?" asked De Loignac.

"Monsieur, you are our general."

"No, not I, monsieur, you are mistaken, but Monsieur le Duc d'Épernon."

"You are our brigadier, then? In that case, it is not enough, monsieur; we need an officer for each squad of fifteen."

"That is so," replied De Loignac, "for I cannot every day divide myself into three parts; and yet I wish among you no other superiority than that of merit."

"Oh! as to that, monsieur, even should you deny it, it will show of its own accord, and from the individual work you will know the difference if there is none in the *ensemble*."

"I will institute temporary chiefs, then," said De Loignac, having pondered an instant over the words of Sainte Maline; "with the password I will give the name of the chief. In this way, each one in turn will learn to obey and command, for, as yet, I do not know the capability of any one; this capability must develop in order for me to make my choice. I will look around and judge."

Sainte Maline bowed and returned to the ranks.

"But you understand," went on De Loignac, "I have divided you into squads of fifteen; you know your numbers; the first

at the staircase, the second in the court, the third in the lodgings; the latter, partly dressed, the swords by the bed, that is, ready to march at the first signal. Now go, gentlemen. Monsieur de Montcrabeau and Monsieur de Pincornay, to-morrow the payment of your fine; I am treasurer; go."

All left. Ernauton de Carmainges alone remained.

"You desire something, monsieur?" said De Loignac.

"Yes, monsieur," said Ernauton, bowing; "it seems to me that you forgot to say what we were to do. To be in the service of the King is a glorious phrase, no doubt, but I greatly desire to know what this service involves."

"That, monsieur," replied De Loignac, "is a delicate question, and one which I cannot fully answer."

"Might I venture to inquire why, monsieur?"

All these words were addressed to Monsieur de Loignac with such exquisite politeness, that, contrary to his habit, the latter sought in vain for a severe reply.

"Because I myself am often ignorant in the morning of what I shall do in the evening."

"Monsieur," said Carmainges, "you hold such a high position with regard to us that you ought to know many things of which we are ignorant."

"Do as I do, Monsieur de Carmainges: learn these things without being told them; I will not prevent you."

"I appeal to your knowledge, monsieur," said Ernauton, "because having come to court without friendship or hatred, guided by no passion, I can, without being of more worth, be more useful to you than another."

"You have neither friendships nor hatreds?"

"No, monsieur."

"But, at least, you love the King, I presume?"

"I ought to and I wish to, Monsieur de Loignac, as a servant; as a servant and a gentleman."

"Well! that is one of the cardinal points by which you should be guided; if you are a clever man, it ought to help you to find the one who is against him."

"Very well, monsieur," replied Ernauton, bowing, "behold me determined; there still remains a point, however, about which I am greatly troubled."

"What is it, monsieur?"

"Passive obedience."

"It is the first condition."

"I understand perfectly, monsieur. Passive obedience is sometimes difficult for men sensitive as to honor."

"That does not concern me, Monsieur de Carmainges," said De Loignac.

"But, monsieur, when an order displeases you?"

"I read the signature of Monsieur d'Épernon, and that consoles me."

"And Monsieur d'Épernon?"

"Monsieur d'Épernon reads the signature of his Majesty, and consoles himself as I do."

"You are right, monsieur," said Ernauton, "and I am your humble servant."

Ernauton made a move to withdraw; it was De Loignac who detained him.

"But you have awakened in me certain ideas," said he, "and I will tell you something which I would not tell the others, because they have had neither the courage nor the courtesy to speak to me as you have done."

Ernauton bowed.

"Monsieur," said De Loignac, approaching the young man, "perhaps some great personage will arrive this evening; do not lose sight of him, but follow him wherever he goes, on leaving the Louvre."

"Monsieur, permit me to say to you that this would be spying."

"Spying! do you think so?" said De Loignac, coldly; "that is possible, but wait" —

He drew from his doublet a paper, which he held out to Carmainges; the latter unfolded it and read:

"Have Monsieur de Mayenne followed this evening, if he ventures, by chance, to present himself at the Louvre."

"Signed?" asked De Loignac.

"Signed 'D'Épernon,'" read Carmainges.

"Well, monsieur?"

"Well," replied Ernauton, bowing low; "I will follow Monsieur de Mayenne."

And he withdrew.

CHAPTER XXXII.

MESSIEURS THE BOURGEOIS OF PARIS.

Monsieur de Mayenne, with whom the Louvre was so much concerned, and who was so little aware of this, left the Hôtel de Guise by a rear door, and, booted and on horseback, as though he had just returned from travelling, presented himself at the Louvre with three attendants.

Monsieur d'Épernon, informed of his coming, had his visit announced to the King.

Monsieur de Loignac, warned on his part, had sent a second order to the Forty-Five; fifteen, therefore, were to post themselves, as had been arranged, in the antechambers, fifteen in the court, and fourteen in the lodgings. We say fourteen, because Ernauton, as we know, having received a special mission, was not with his companions.

But as the following of Monsieur de Mayenne was not of a nature to inspire fear, the second squad received orders to return to the barracks.

Monsieur de Mayenne, admitted to his Majesty, made him a respectful visit, which the King received with a pretence of affection.

"Well, cousin," said the King to him, "you have come to pay Paris a visit?"

"Yes, sire," said Mayenne; "I thought I ought to come in my brother's name and my own, to remind your Majesty that you have no more faithful subjects than ourselves."

"By Heaven!" exclaimed Henry, "the fact is so well known, that, apart from the pleasure that you know a visit from you gives me, you might, in truth, have saved yourself this little trip. There surely must have been some other motive for it?"

"Sire, I feared that your good will towards the house of De Guise might be altered by the singular reports which for some time our enemies have been circulating."

"What reports?" asked the King, with the good nature which made him so dangerous to the most intimate.

"What!" demanded Mayenne, somewhat disconcerted, "your Majesty has heard nothing which might prove unfavorable to us?"

"Cousin," said the King, "know once for all that I would not permit any one here to speak ill of the De Guises; and as they know this better than you seem to know it, they do not speak of it, duke."

"Then, sire," said Mayenne, "I do not regret having come, since I have had the pleasure of seeing my King and of finding him of such a mind; but I will admit that my haste was useless."

"Oh! duke, Paris is a good city, from which there is always something to be obtained," said the King.

"Yes, sire, but we have our affairs at Soissons."

"Which ones, duke?"

"Those of your Majesty, sire."

"That is true, that is true, Mayenne; continue, therefore, to attend to them as you have begun; I know how to appreciate and reward, as the conduct of my subjects deserves."

The duke withdrew, smiling.

The King reëntered his chamber, rubbing his hands.

De Loignac made a sign to Ernauton, who said a word to his valet and set out to follow the four horsemen.

The valet ran to the stable, and Ernauton followed on foot. There was no danger of losing Monsieur de Mayenne; the indiscretion of Perducas de Pincornay had made known the arrival in Paris of a prince of the house of De Guise. At this news, the good Leaguers had begun to come from their houses and to dog his footsteps.

Mayenne was not hard to recognize with his broad shoulders, his rounded figure, and his pointed beard, as the *Étoile* said.

They followed him therefore to the gates of the Louvre, and there the same companions waited until he came out to accompany him to the doors of his hôtel.

In vain Mayneville scattered the most zealous, by saying to them:

"Not so much ardor, my friends, not so much ardor; good God! you will compromise us."

The duke had an escort of no less than two or three hundred men when he arrived at the Hôtel Saint Denis, which he had chosen as his quarters.

This made it very easy for Ernauton to follow him without being noticed.

Just as the duke entered, and turned around to bow, he thought he recognized one of the gentlemen who bowed at

the same time as the cavalier who had accompanied the page whom he had helped to pass into the city through the Porte Saint Antoine, and who had shown such strange interest in the execution of Salcède.

Almost at the same instant, and just as Mayenne had disappeared, a litter cut through the crowd. Mayneville went to meet it; one of the curtains was drawn back, and, thanks to a ray of moonlight, Ernauton thought he recognized in his page the lady of the Porte Saint Antoine.

Mayneville and the lady exchanged a few words; the litter disappeared under the porch of the hôtel; Mayneville followed the litter and the door closed.

An instant later Mayneville appeared on the balcony, thanked the Parisians in the name of the duke, and as it was growing late, invited them to return to their houses in order that evil tongues might not take advantage of their assembling.

Every one departed at this suggestion, with the exception of ten men who had entered in the suite of the duke.

Ernauton withdrew like the others, or rather, while the others were leaving, he pretended to withdraw. The ten elect who remained to the exclusion of all the others were deputies from the League, sent to Monsieur de Mayenne to thank him for having come, and at the same time to implore him to persuade his brother to come.

In fact, these worthy bourgeois, of whom we already caught a glimpse the evening of the sale of the cuirasses, who were not lacking in imagination, had formulated in their preparatory meetings a number of plans which lacked only the sanction and support of a chief on whom they could rely.

Bussy Leclerc announced that he had exercised three convents in the handling of arms, and enrolled five hundred bourgeois, that is to say, he had put in the state of being unattached an effective force of a thousand men.

Lachapelle Marteau had conversed with the magistrates, the clerks, and all the people of the palace. He could offer both counsel and action; represent the counsel by two hundred black robes, the action by two hundred police officers.

Brigard had the merchants of the Rue des Lombards, the pillars of the market-places, and of the Rue Saint Denis.

Crucé shared the lawyers with Lachapelle Marteau, and disposed, besides, of the University of Paris.

Delbar offered all the bargemen and the people of the wharves, a dangerous lot, forming a contingent of five hundred men.

Louchard disposed of five hundred horse jockeys and horse dealers, mad Catholics.

A pewterer named Pollard and a pork-butcher named Gilbert presented fifteen hundred butchers and pork-butchers from the city and the suburbs.

Maître Nicholas Poulain, Chicot's friend, offered everything and everybody.

When the duke, securely shut up in a safe chamber, had heard these disclosures and offers:

"I admire the strength of the League," said he, "but the object at which, no doubt, it aims, I do not see."

Maître Lachapelle Marteau at once set out to make a discourse in three periods; he was very prolix, as was a well-known fact, and Mayenne shuddered.

"Let us make it short," said he. Bussy Leclerc interrupted Marteau.

"Well," said he, "we are hungry for a change; we are the strongest, and consequently we wish this change; this is short, clear, and precise."

"But," demanded Mayenne, "how will you go to work to effect this change?"

"It seems to me," said Bussy Leclerc, with that frankness of speech which in a man of such humble station in life as himself might be looked on as boldness, "it seems to me that, since the idea of the Union came from our chiefs, that it is for our chiefs and not for us to indicate the object."

"Gentlemen," replied Mayenne, "you are perfectly right; the object ought to be indicated by those who have the honor to be your chiefs; but this is the time to repeat to you that the general should be the judge of the moment to engage in battle, and that even though he has seen his troops ranged, armed, and animated, he gives the signal to charge only when he thinks right to do so."

"But, indeed, my lord," said Crucé, "the League is in a hurry; we have already had the honor of telling you so."

"In a hurry for what, Monsieur Crucé?" asked Mayenne.

"To arrive."

"At what?"

"At our object; we have our own plan also."

"Then it is different," said Mayenne, "if you have your plan, I have nothing further to say."

"Yes, my lord; but may we count on your help?"

"Without a doubt, if this plan pleases my brother and myself."

"It is probable, my lord, that it will please you."

"In that case, let us hear your plan."

The Leaguers looked at one another; two or three made a sign to Lachapelle Marteau to speak.

The latter advanced, and appeared to beg permission of the duke to explain himself.

"Speak," said the duke.

"This is it, my lord," said Marteau; "the idea came to Leclerc, Crucé, and myself; we thought about it, and it is probable that its result is assured."

"In point of fact, Marteau, in point of fact!"

"There are several quarters in the city which include among them all the forces of the city, the great and the small chatelet, the palace of the Temple, the Hôtel de Ville, the arsenal, and the Louvre."

"That is true," said the duke.

"All these points are protected by permanent garrisons, but are easy ones to overcome, because they cannot expect a sudden attack."

"I admit this, also," said the duke.

"But the city is further defended; first, by the captain of the night watch with his archers, who stroll through the places that are in danger, and are the real defense of Paris. This is what we have planned: to seize in his house the captain of the watch, who lives at the Couture Sainte Catherine. The attack could be made without noise, the place being deserted and isolated."

Mayenne shook his head.

"Deserted and isolated as it is," said he, "one does not break down a solid door and fire twenty shots without some noise."

"We have foreseen this objection, my lord," said Marteau; "one of the archers of the captain of the watch is with us. In the middle of the night, just two or three of us will knock on the door; the archer will open; he will go and inform the captain that his Majesty wishes to speak to him — there will be nothing strange in that; about once a month the King

sends to this officer for reports and despatches. The door thus opened, we will have ten men enter, bargemen who live in the Saint Paul quarter, and who will dispatch the captain of the watch."

"That is, they will cut his throat?"

"Yes, my lord. Thus the first orders of defense will be intercepted. It is true that other magistrates, other officers may be sent ahead by the trembling bourgeois or the politicians. There are Monsieur the President, Monsieur d'O, Monsieur de Chiverny, Monsieur the Procurer Laguesle; well! we will force their houses at the same time; Saint Bartholomew taught us how that was done, and we will treat them as we will have treated Monsieur the Captain of the Watch."

"Ah! ah!" said the duke, who found the affair serious.

"It will be an excellent chance, my lord, to fall upon the politicians, all designated in our quarters, and to make an end of the religious heretics and the political heretics."

"All this is very well, gentlemen," said Mayenne, "but you have not explained to me if you will also seize the Louvre at this time, a veritable stronghold, in which guards and gentlemen are constantly on the watch. The King, timid as he is, will not let his throat be cut like the captain of the watch; he will take his sword in hand, and, remember this, he is king; his presence will have great effect on the bourgeois, and you will be defeated."

"We have chosen four thousand men for this expedition to the Louvre, my lord, and four thousand men who are not fond enough of the Valois for his presence to produce on them the effect you mention."

"You think that will be sufficient?"

"Without doubt; we shall be ten to one," said Bussy-Leclerc.

"And the Swiss? there are four thousand of them, gentlemen."

"Yes, but they are at Laguy, and Laguy is eight leagues from Paris; so admitting that the King might be able to get word to them, it would take two hours for the messengers to make the trip on horseback, eight hours for the Swiss to make it on foot, that is, ten hours; and they would arrive just in time to be stopped at the gates; for in ten hours we shall be masters of the whole city."

"Well! so be it, I admit all that: the captain of the watch has his throat cut, the politicians are killed, the authorities of

the city have disappeared, every obstacle is overcome, in fact; you have no doubt agreed on what you will do then?"

"We shall organize a government of honest men, like ourselves," said Brigard, "and provided we succeed in our little trade, provided that we have bread assured to our children and our wives, we desire nothing more. A little ambition perhaps might make some of us wish to be tithing-men, local police officers, or commanders of a company of militia; well, Monsieur le Duc, we will be such, but that is all. You see that we are not exacting."

"Monsieur Brigard, you speak as well as possible! yes, you are honest, I well know, and you shall not suffer any mixture in your ranks."

"Oh! no! no!" cried several voices, "no dregs with good wine."

"Very good!" said the duke; "that is talking. Now let us see. Monsieur the Lieutenant of the Provostship, are there many loafers and good-for-nothing people in the Isle de France?"

Nicholas Poulain, who had not once put himself to the front, advanced as though in spite of himself.

"Yes, my lord," said he, "there are too many."

"Can you give us an idea of the number of this population?"

"Yes, approximately."

"Estimate, then, Maître Poulain."

Poulain began to count on his fingers:

"Robbers, three to four thousand; idlers and beggars, two thousand to two thousand five hundred; occasional thieves, fifteen hundred to two thousand; assassins, four to five hundred.

"Good! there, at a low estimate, are six thousand or six thousand five hundred scoundrels of the sack and cord. To what religion do these fellows belong?"

"Beg pardon, my lord?" asked Poulain.

"I ask whether they are Catholics or Huguenots."

Poulain began to laugh.

"They are of all religions, my lord," said he, "or rather of one alone, — their God is gold, and blood is their prophet."

"Well, so much for the religious religion, if one may so call it; and now, as to the political religion, what shall we say? Are they Valois, Leaguers, political zealots, or Navarrais?"

"They are bandits and plunderers."

"My lord, do not imagine," said Crucé, "that we shall ever take those people as allies."

"No, certainly I do not imagine it, Monsieur Crucé, and that is really what troubles me."

"And why should that trouble you, my lord," asked some members of the deputation in surprise.

"Ah! gentlemen, understand that it is because those men, who have no opinion, and who consequently do not fraternize with you, seeing that there are no longer magistrates in Paris, no longer public power, no longer royalty; in short, no longer anything which holds them in check, will set to work to plunder your shops while you wage war, and your homes while you occupy the Louvre; now they will side with the Swiss against you, now with you against the Swiss, so that they will always be the stronger."

"The devil!" said the deputies, looking at one another.

"I think it is serious enough to be thought of; is it not, gentlemen?" said the duke. "As to me, I will consider it, and I will try and find a means of overcoming this obstacle; for your interest before ours, is my brother's maxim and my own."

The deputies gave a murmur of approbation.

"Now, gentlemen, permit a man who has ridden twenty-four leagues on horseback night and day to sleep for a few hours; there is no danger in the lodgings for the present at least, while if you were to act, there would be; this is not your opinion, perhaps?"

"Oh! yes, Monsieur le Duc," said Brigard.

"Very good."

"We will take our very humble leave of you, then, my lord," continued Brigard, "and when you wish to appoint another meeting" —

"That shall be as soon as possible, gentlemen, you may be sure," said Mayenne; "to-morrow, perhaps, the day after at the latest."

And taking final leave of them, he left them thoroughly astonished at his foresight, which had discovered a danger of which they had not even dreamed.

Scarcely had he disappeared when a door hidden in the tapestry opened and a woman rushed into the room.

"The duchess!" cried the deputies.

"Yes, gentlemen!" she exclaimed, "and who comes to help you out of your difficulty."

The deputies, who knew her resolution, but who, at the same time, feared her enthusiasm, crowded around her.

"Gentlemen," continued the duchess, smiling, "what the Hebrews were unable to effect, Judith alone accomplished. Hope! I too have my plan."

And presenting to the Leaguers two white hands, which the most gallant kissed, she went away by the door which had already given exit to Mayenne.

"By Heaven," exclaimed Bussy Leclerc, biting his mustaches and following the duchess, "I decidedly think that she is the man of the family!"

"Oh!" murmured Nicholas Poulain, wiping the perspiration which had come out on his forehead at sight of Madame de Montpensier, "I should like to be out of all this."

PART II.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

BROTHER BORROMÉE.

It was almost ten o'clock in the evening before the deputies began to return, very contrite, and at the corner of each street that was nearest to their individual houses parting from one another, in exchanging civilities. Nicholas Poulain, who lived the furthest away of all, walked on alone, reflecting deeply on the perplexing situation which had caused him to give utterance to the exclamation which ends the closing paragraph of our last chapter.

In short, the day had been full of events for every one and particularly for him. He was returning to his home, therefore, trembling at what he had just heard, and saying to himself that if the Shade had thought fit to drive him to a denunciation of the plot of Vincennes, Robert Briquet would never pardon him for not having revealed to Monsieur de Mayenne the plan so clearly explained by Lachapelle Marteau.

As he walked along, deep in his reflections, in the middle of the Rue de la Pierre-au-Réal, a sort of trench four feet wide, which led to the street Neuve Saint Méry, Nicholas Poulain saw a Jacobin monk, his robe tucked up to his knees, running towards him. He had to step aside, for two Christians could not pass abreast in this street.

Nicholas Poulain hoped that monachal humility would give way to him, a man of the sword; but it was not so; the monk ran like a startled deer, so swiftly that he would have knocked down a wall, and Nicholas Poulain, though swearing, had to step aside so as not to be knocked down. At once there began between them, in that tunnel lined with houses, the irritating evolution which takes place between two undecided men, both of whom wish to pass, who do not wish to embrace

each other, but who always find themselves thrown into each other's arms.

Poulain swore, the monk cursed, and the man of the gown, less patient than the man of the sword, seized the latter by the middle of his body to hurl him against the wall.

In this conflict, and just as they were on the point of pommelling each other, they recognized each other.

"Brother Borromée!" cried Poulain.

"Maître Nicholas Poulain!" exclaimed the monk.

"How do you do?" went on Poulain, with the admirable good nature and the unchangeable mildness of the Parisian bourgeois.

"Very poorly," replied the monk, much more difficult to calm than the layman, "for you have delayed me and I was in great haste."

"Devil of a man that you are!" replied Poulain; "always as belligerent as a Roman! But where in the devil are you running at this hour in such haste? Is the priory on fire?"

"No, but I was going to the duchess's to speak to Mayneville."

"To what duchess?"

"There is but one, it seems to me, at whose house one could speak to Mayneville," said Borromée, who at first had thought he could reply categorically to the lieutenant of the provostship, because this lieutenant might have him followed, but who nevertheless did not wish to be too communicative to the inquisitive man.

"Well," said Nicholas Poulain, "what were you going to do at Madame de Montpensier's?"

"Ah, my God! that is very simple," said Borromée, seeking for a specious reply; "our reverend prior was asked by Madame la Duchesse to become her confessor; he had consented, but a conscientious scruple seized him and he refused. The meeting was fixed for to-morrow; I must therefore, on the part of Dom Modeste Gorenflot, tell the duchess that she must no longer count on him."

"Very good; but you do not look as though you were going in the direction of the Hôtel de Guise, my very dear brother; I will even say that you are actually turning your back on it."

"That is so," replied Brother Borromée, "because I am coming from it."

"But where are you going, then?"

"They told me at the hôtel that Madame la Duchesse had gone to call on Monsieur de Mayenne, who arrived this evening, and who has taken rooms at the Hôtel Saint Denis."

"True again. In fact," said Poulain, "the duke is at the Hôtel Saint Denis, and the duchess is with the duke; but comrade, what is the use of playing the politician with me? It is not usually the treasurer who is sent to carry out the commissions of the convent."

"Where a princess is concerned, why not?"

"And you, the confidant of Mayneville, do not believe in the confessions of Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier?"

"What should I believe, then?"

"The devil! My dear fellow, you well know the distance from the priory to the middle of the road, since you had me measure it; take care! You tell me so little about it that I shall perhaps believe too much."

"And you will be wrong, dear Monsieur Poulain; I know nothing else. Now, do not detain me, I beg, for I shall not find Madame la Duchesse."

"You will always find her in her own house, to which she will return, and where you might have waited for her."

"Ah! well!" exclaimed Borromée, "I should not be sorry to see a little of Monsieur le Duc."

"Come, now."

"You know him; if once I let him go to his mistress, we cannot lay hands on him again."

"Ah! That is talking. Now that I know with whom you have business, I will leave you; adieu, and good luck to you!"

Borromée, seeing the way clear, in exchange for the good wishes given him threw a brisk good-night to Nicholas Poulain, and hurried down the open street.

"Well, well, there is always something new," said Nicholas Poulain to himself, as he watched the robe of the Jacobin growing fainter and fainter in the gloom; "but why in the devil do I need to know what is going on? Am I, perhaps, growing to like the trade which I am condemned to carry on? For shame!"

And he went to bed, not with the calmness of a quiet conscience, but with the peace which, in every position of the world, false as it may be, the support of one stronger than ourselves gives us.

In the meantime, Borromée continued on his way, with a speed which gave him the hope of making up lost time.

He knew, in fact, the habits of Monsieur de Mayenne, and in order to be well informed, no doubt, had reasons which he did not think necessary to relate minutely to Maître Nicholas Poulain.

Nevertheless, he reached the Hôtel Saint Denis, perspiring and out of breath, just as the duke and the duchess had finished talking over their affairs of importance and Monsieur de Mayenne was taking leave of his sister that he might be free to pay a visit to the lady of the Cité about whom we know that Joyeuse had cause to complain.

The brother and sister, after several remarks on the reception of the King, and the plan of the ten, had agreed upon the following facts:

The King had no suspicions, and was from day to day more easy to attack.

The important thing was to organize the League in the provinces of the north, while the King abandoned his brother and forgot Henry of Navarre.

Of these last two enemies, the Duc d'Anjou, with his dull ambition, was the only one to fear; as to Henry of Navarre, they knew of him from well-informed spies; he was engaged merely in making love to his three or four mistresses.

"Paris was in readiness," said Mayenne aloud; "but their alliance with the royal family gave strength to the politicians and the true royalists. They must wait for a rupture between the King and his allies; this rupture, with the fickleness of Henry, could not be slow in taking place. But, as nothing is pressing," continued Mayenne, "let us wait."

"I," said the duchess in a low tone, "I needed ten men scattered throughout the quarters of Paris to stir it up after the blow I meditate; I have found these ten men, I ask nothing more."

They were at this point, the one in his dialogue, the other in her asides, when Mayneville entered suddenly, announcing that Borromée wished to speak to Monsieur le Duc.

"Borromée!" said the duke in surprise, "who is he?"

"My lord, he is the one you sent to me from Nancy, when I asked your highness for a man of action and intelligence."

"I remember; I told you that I had both in one, and I

sent you Captain Borroville. Has he changed his name to Borromée ?"

"Yes, my lord, his name and his uniform ; he calls himself Borromée and is a Jacobin."

"Borroville a Jacobin ?"

"Yes, my lord."

"And why is he a Jacobin ? The devil would laugh heartily if he recognized him under his gown."

"Why is he a Jacobin ?"

The duchess made a sign to Mayneville.

"You shall know later," continued the latter ; "that is our secret, my lord ; in the meantime, let us hear Captain Borroville or Brother Borromée as you please."

"Yes, especially as his visit disturbs me," said Madame de Montpensier.

"And me too, I admit," said Mayneville.

"Then introduce him without losing an instant," said the duchess.

As to the duke, he fluctuated between the desire to hear the messenger and the fear of missing the meeting with his mistress.

He glanced at the door and at the clock.

The door opened, and the clock struck eleven.

"Well, Borromée," said the duke, unable to keep from laughing, in spite of a little ill humor, "how you are disguised, my friend !"

"My lord," said the captain, "I am, indeed, very ill at ease under this devil of a robe ; but what must be must be, as Monsieur de Guise, senior, used to say."

"It is not I, however, who have thrust you into this robe, Borroville," said the duke ; "so do not bear me ill will on account of it, I beg you."

"No, my lord, it is Madame la Duchesse ; but I bear her no grudge, since I am at her service."

"Many thanks, captain ; and now let us see what you have to say to us so late ?"

"That which, unfortunately, I could not tell you earlier, my lord, for I had the whole priory on my hands."

"Well ! speak now."

"Monsieur le Duc," said Borroville, "the King is sending aid to the Duc d'Anjou."

"Bah !" said Mayenne, "we know that song ; they have sung it for three years."

"Oh! yes; but this time, my lord, I give you the news for a certainty."

"Humph!" said Mayenne, with a toss of the head like that of a shying horse, "for a certainty?"

"This very day, that is, last night, at two o'clock in the morning, Monsieur de Joyeuse set out for Rouen. He starts by sea from Dieppe and carries three thousand men to Antwerp."

"Oh! oh!" said the duke, "and who told you that, Borroville?"

"A man who himself is leaving for Navarre, my lord."

"For Navarre! To Henry?"

"Yes, my lord."

"And on whose part is he going to Henry?"

"On the part of the King; yes, my lord, on the part of the King, and with a letter from the King."

"Who is this man?"

"He calls himself Robert Briquet."

"Well?"

"He is a great friend of Dom Gorenflot."

"A great friend of Dom Gorenflot?"

"They call each other thee and thou."

"An ambassador from the King?"

"Of this I am certain; he sent some one from the priory to the Louvre for a letter of credit. It was one of our monks who carried out the commission."

"And this monk?"

"Was our little soldier, Jacques Clement, the one you noticed, Madame la Duchesse."

"And he did not tell you what the letter contained?" said Mayenne; "the stupid!"

"My lord, the King did not give it to him; he had it carried to the messenger by servants of his own."

"We must have this letter, by Heaven!"

"Certainly we must have it," said the duchess.

"How is it that you did not think of that?" said Mayneville.

"I thought of it so much that I tried to send to the messenger, as travelling companion, one of my men, a Hercules; but Robert Briquet mistrusted him and sent him back."

"You must go yourself."

"Impossible."

"Why?"

"He knows me."

"As a monk, but not as a captain, I trust?"

"Faith, I know nothing about it; this Robert Briquet has a very searching eye."

"What kind of a man is he, then?" asked Mayenne.

"A tall, thin fellow, all nerve, all muscle, and all bone clever, bantering, and taciturn."

"Ah! ah! and he handles the sword?"

"Like one who invented it, my lord."

"A long face?"

"My lord, he has every kind of face."

"A friend of the prior?"

"From the time when he was a simple monk."

"Oh! I have a suspicion," said Mayenne, frowning, "and I will enlighten myself."

"Do so quickly, my lord, for, formed as he is, this fellow must walk at a vigorous pace."

"Borroville," said Mayenne, "you will set out for Soissons, where my brother is."

"But the priory, my lord?"

"Are you so embarrassed," said Mayneville, "at making up a story for Dom Modeste, and does he not believe anything that you wish to make him believe?"

"You will say to Monsieur de Guise," continued Mayenne, "all that you know of the mission of Monsieur de Joyeuse."

"Yes, my lord."

"And Navarre that you are forgetting, Mayenne?" said the duchess.

"I am forgetting it so little that I will look after it myself," replied Mayenne. "Have them saddle a fresh horse for me, Mayneville." Then he added in a low tone:

"Can he be living still? Oh, yes, he must be living!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CHICOT, STUDENT OF LATIN.

After the departure of the young men, we may remember that Chicot set out with rapid steps.

But as soon as they had disappeared in the valley which forms the slope of the bridge of Juvisy sur l'Orge, Chicot, who, like Argus, seemed to have the privilege of seeing behind, and who no longer perceived either Ernauton or Sainte Maline, — Chicot stopped at the culminating point of the rising ground, examined the horizon, the ditches, the plain, the bushes, the river, everything, in short, to the dappled clouds which were sailing obliquely behind the great elms along the road; and sure of having seen no one who might trouble or spy on him, he seated himself on the other side of a ditch, his back against a tree, and began what he called his examination of conscience.

He had two purses of money, for he had perceived that the bag given him by Sainte Maline, besides the royal letter, contained certain round rolling objects which greatly resembled gold or silver money. The bag was a veritable royal purse, with two H's on it, one embroidered above, the other below.

"That is pretty," said Chicot, looking at the purse, "it is charming on the part of the King! His name, his arms! No one is more generous and more stupid! Decidedly, I shall never make anything of him. On my word of honor!" continued Chicot, "if one thing surprises me it is that this kind and good King did not at the same time have embroidered on the same purse the letter which he sends me to carry to his brother-in-law, and my receipt as well. Why trouble ourselves? All the political world is out in the open air to-day; let us talk politics like the rest of the world. Bah! if they should do a little assassinating to this poor Chicot, as they have already done to the courier which this same Henry sent to Rome, Monsieur de Joyeuse, it would be one enemy the less, that is all; and friends are so common at the present time that one can be prodigal of them. The Almighty chooses badly when he chooses! Now, let us see first what money there is in the purse; we will examine the letter afterwards. A hundred crowns! just the same amount that I borrowed from Gorenflot. Ah! pardon, let us not calumniate;

here is a little bag — of Spanish gold, five quadruples. Well! well! that is delicate; he is very thoughtful, Henriquet! Well! in truth, were it not for the letters and the fleur-de-lis, which seem to me superfluous, I would send him a big kiss. Now this purse troubles me; it seems to me that the birds, flying over my head, will take me for a royal emissary, and will make fun of me, or, what would be worse, will denounce me to the passers-by."

Chicot emptied his purse into the hollow of his hand, drew from his pocket Gorenflot's simple linen bag, and slipped into it the silver and gold crowns, saying to them:

"You may rest quietly together, my children, for you come from the same country."

Then, drawing in turn the letter from the bag, he put in its place a stone which he picked up, tied the string of the bag around the stone, and threw it, as a slinger does a pebble, into the Orge, which wound like a serpent below the bridge.

The water spurted up, two or three circles stirred the calm surface, and grew wider and wider until they broke against the banks.

"That for myself," said Chicot; "now we will work for Henry."

He took the letter, which he had laid on the ground in order the more easily to throw the purse into the river.

But there was coming along the road a donkey laden with wood. Two women were leading the donkey, which walked with a step as proud as if, instead of wood, he was carrying relics.

Chicot hid the letter in his large hand, which he leaned on the ground, and let them pass by. Once alone, he took the letter again, tore away the envelope, and broke the seal with the most imperturbable tranquillity, as though it were a question of a simple letter from a procurator.

Then he took the envelope, which he rolled between his two hands, and the seal, which he ground between two stones, and sent them both after the purse.

"Now," said Chicot, "let us look at the style."

And he opened the letter and read:

"Our very dear brother, the profound love which our very dear brother and deceased King Charles the Ninth bore you still lives under the arches of the Louvre and clings obstinately to my heart."

Chicot bowed.

"Therefore it is repugnant to me to talk to you on sad and grievous subjects; but you are strong in adverse fortune; so I no longer hesitate to communicate to you these facts which one says only to brave and tried friends."

Chicot interrupted himself and bowed again.

"Besides," he continued, "I have a royal interest in convincing you of this feeling; it is the honor of my name and of yours, my brother.

"We resemble each other on this point, that we are both surrounded by enemies. Chicot will explain it to you."

"*Chicotus explicabit!*" said Chicot, "or rather *evolvet*, which is infinitely more elegant."

"Your servant, Monsieur le Vicomte de Turenne, furnishes daily subject for scandal at your court. God forbid that I should interfere in your affairs, except for your happiness and honor! But your wife, whom to my great regret I call my sister, ought to have this care for you in my stead and place — which she has not."

"Oh! oh!" said Chicot, continuing his Latin translation, "*Quœque omittit facere.* That is hard."

"I therefore ask you, brother, to watch, so that the relations of Margot with the Vicomte de Turenne, strangely allied with our common friends, do not bring shame and injury to the house of Bourbon. Make an example as soon as you are sure of the fact, and make sure of the fact as soon as you have had Chicot explain my letter."

"*Statuis atque audiveris Chicotum litteras explicantem.* Let us continue," said Chicot.

"It would be grievous for the least suspicion to hover over the legitimacy of your inheritance, brother, a precious point of which God forbids me to think; for, alas! I am condemned in advance not to live again in my posterity.

"The two accomplices whom, as brother and King, I denounce to you meet the most of the time in a small château which is called Loignac. They choose the pretext of a chase; this château is, besides, a hot-bed of intrigues, to which the De Guises are not strangers; for you know, doubtless, my dear Henry, with what strange love my sister pursued Henry de Guise, and my own brother Monsieur d'Anjou, at the time I myself bore this name, and when he was called Duc d'Alençon."

"*Quo et quam irregulari amore sit prosecuta et Henricum Guisium et germanum meum,* et cetera."

"I embrace you, and recommend my suggestions to you, always ready, moreover, to aid you in everything and for everything. In the meantime, aid yourself by the advice of Chicot, whom I send to you."

"*Age, auctore Chicoto.* Good!"

"Behold me counsellor of the Kingdom of Navarre.

"Your affectionate," et cetera, et cetera.

Having read this, Chicot put his head between his hands.

"Oh!" said he, "this, it seems to me, is rather a bad commission, and which proves to me that in fleeing from one evil, as Horatius Flaccus says, one falls into a worse one. In truth, I prefer Mayenne. And yet, apart from that devil of an embroidered purse, for which I cannot forgive him, the letter is that of a clever man. In fact, supposing Henriot kneaded of the dough of which husbands are ordinarily made, this letter will embroil him at once with his wife, Turenne, Anjou, De Guise, and even with Spain. In order for Henry of Valois to be so well informed at the Louvre as to what is taking place with Henry of Navarre at Pau, there must be some spy there, and this spy will greatly puzzle Henriot. On the other hand, the letter will cause me much trouble if I meet a Spaniard, a Lorraine, a Béarnais, or a Fleming, curious enough to want to know for what I am sent to Béarn. But I would not be very far-sighted if I did not expect a meeting with some such curious person. Monsieur Borromée, especially, or I am greatly mistaken, is reserving something for me.

"Second point.

"What did Chicot seek, when he asked a mission of King Henry? Tranquillity was his object.

"But Chicot is going to embroil the King of Navarre with his wife. This is not Chicot's business, except that Chicot by embroiling among themselves such powerful personages is going to make mortal enemies for himself, who will prevent his reaching the happy limit of eighty years. Faith! so much the better, one lives well only while one is young. But then it would have been just as well to wait for the blow from Monsieur de Mayenne's knife.

"No, for reciprocity is necessary in everything; this is Chicot's motto. Chicot will therefore continue his journey. But Chicot is a man of intelligence, and will take precautions. Consequently he will have with him nothing but money, so that if they kill Chicot they injure only him. Chicot, there-

fore, will put the finishing touch to what he has begun that is, he will translate this beautiful epistle, from beginning to end, into Latin, and will impress it on his memory, whereon already two-thirds of it are engraved; then he will buy a horse, because, really, from Juvisy to Pau it is necessary to put the right foot before the left too many times. But before doing all these things Chicot will tear the letter from his friend Henry of Valois into an infinite number of little pieces, and he will take particular care that these little pieces, reduced to the state of atoms, shall go, some into the Orge, some into the air, and the remainder he will entrust to the earth, our common mother, to whose breast everything returns, even the foolishness of kings. When Chicot shall have finished what he has begun" — and Chicot interrupted himself to carry out his plan of division. A third of the letter, therefore, went by water, another third by the air, and the last third disappeared in a hole dug for this purpose with an instrument which was neither dagger nor knife, but which, if need be, could take the place of either, and which Chicot wore at his belt.

"Chicot will resume his journey with the most minute precautions, and he will dine in the good city of Corbeil, like the honest fellow that he is. Meanwhile," continued Chicot, "let us occupy ourselves with the Latin theme which we have decided to compose. I believe we shall prepare a rather pretty morsel."

Suddenly Chicot stopped; he perceived that he could not translate into Latin the word Louvre; this greatly troubled him.

He was likewise forced to change the word Margot into *Margota*, as he had already changed Chicot into *Chicotus*, whereas, to speak correctly, he must have translated Chicot into *Chicôt* and Margot into *Margôt*, which was not Latin, but Greek. As to Margarita, he did not think of it; the translation in his opinion would not have been exact.

All this Latin, with the search for purism and the Ciceronian turn, brought Chicot as far as Corbeil, a pleasant city, where the bold messenger paid little heed to the wonders of Saint Spire, and a great deal to a keeper of a cook-shop, who perfumed with his appetizing odors the vicinity of the cathedral. We will not describe the feast he had; we will not try to depict the horse he bought in the stable of the inn — this would be imposing too rigorous a task on us: we will

merely say that the repast was of sufficient length and the horse poor enough to furnish us, if we were not over-scrupulous, with material for almost a volume.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE FOUR WINDS.

Chicot, with his little horse, which must have been a very good one to carry so great a personage, having slept at Fontainebleau, made a turn to the right, the following day, and pushed on as far as a small village named Orgeval. He would gladly have ridden a few leagues more that day, for he seemed anxious to get away from Paris, but his mount began to stumble so frequently and so badly that he thought it imperative to halt.

Besides, his eyes, usually so practised, had not succeeded in perceiving anything on the road.

Men, wagons, and bars had appeared to him perfectly inoffensive. But Chicot, safe, at least apparently, did not on that account live in security; no one, indeed, as our readers must know, believed less and trusted less in appearances than Chicot.

Therefore, before making his horse and himself ready for the night, he examined the whole house with great care.

They showed Chicot elegant rooms with three or four doors; but according to his ideas, not only did the rooms have too many doors, but these doors did not close easily enough, either.

The host had just had a large closet repaired without other exit than a door on the stairway; this door was furnished with formidable bolts on the inside.

Chicot had a bed put up for himself in this closet, which at first glance he preferred to the magnificent rooms without means of fortification which had been shown him.

He turned the locks in their staples, and satisfied that their working was both firm and easy, he had his supper laid in his room, forbade them to take away the table, under the pretence that he sometimes was hungry during the night, supped, undressed, placed his clothes on a chair, and went to bed.

But before doing so, as a greater precaution, he drew from

his pocket the purse or rather the bag of crowns and placed it under the pillow with his good sword.

Then he went over the letter three times in his mind.

The table furnished him a second buttress, and yet this double rampart did not seem to him sufficient; he rose, took a clothes-press between both arms, and placed it across the doorway, which it hermetically sealed.

He had therefore between himself and all possible aggression a door, a wardrobe, and a table. The inn had seemed to Chicot almost uninhabited; the host had a frank countenance. That night there was a terrific wind blowing, and there was heard in the neighboring trees that frightful creaking which, in the words of Lucretius, becomes so sweet and hospitable a sound for the traveller, well housed, well covered, and stretched out in a good bed.

After all these preparations for defence Chicot plunged deliciously into his bed. It must be said that it was soft, and made in such a way as to protect a man from any anxiety caused either by men or things.

In short, he was sheltered behind broad curtains of green serge, and a counterpane as thick as eiderdown spread a gentle warmth over the limbs of the sleeping traveller.

Chicot had supped as Hippocrates orders one to do, that is, sparingly: he had drunk but one bottle of wine; his stomach, properly dilated, sent throughout his organism that sensation of comfort communicated without fail by that complaisant organ which with many who are called honest men takes the place of the heart.

Chicot's room was lighted by a lamp which he had placed on the edge of the table next to his bed; he was reading before going to sleep, and in order to put himself to sleep, a very curious new book, which had just appeared and which was the work of a certain mayor of Bordeaux, named Montagne, or Montaigne. The book had been published in Bordeaux in 1581; it contained the first two parts of a work since well known, and entitled "Essays." The volume was interesting enough for a man to read and re-read during the day. But it had at the same time the advantage of being tiresome enough not to keep from sleeping a man who had ridden fifteen leagues on horseback, and who had drunk his generous bottle of wine for supper.

Chicot prized this book highly, the author of which he knew

personally, and on leaving Paris he had put it into the pocket of his doublet. Cardinal Du Perron had called it the breviary of honest men; and Chicot, capable in every point of appreciating the taste and intelligence of the cardinal, — Chicot, we say, willingly took the "Essays" of the mayor of Bordeaux for his breviary.

However, it happened that in reading the eighth chapter he fell into a deep sleep.

The lamp still burned; the door, reënforced by the wardrobe and the table, was still closed; the sword was still under the pillow with the crowns.

Saint Michael the Archangel would have slept like Chicot, without dreaming of Satan, even if he had known that the lion was roaring on the outside of the door and the other side of the bolts.

We have said that a gale was blowing. The hissing of this gigantic serpent glided with frightful melodies under the door and shook the air in a whimsical manner. The wind is the most perfect imitation, or rather the most perfect mockery, of the human voice: now it screams like a crying child, now it imitates in its groans the heavy anger of a husband quarrelling with his wife.

Chicot was a judge of tempests. At the end of an hour all the noise became an element of tranquillity for him; he fought against every inclemency of the season:

Against the cold, with his counterpane; against the wind, with his snoring; yet, even in sleep, it seemed to Chicot that the tempest grew louder, and especially that it came nearer in an unusual fashion.

Suddenly a squall of terrific force shook the door, wrenched away staples and locks, pushed over the wardrobe, which lost its balance and fell against the lamp, which it extinguished, and on the table, which it crushed. Chicot, although a sound sleeper, had the faculty of waking quickly and with all his presence of mind; this presence of mind told him that he would better slip from the side of the bed than get out in front. As he let himself out, his two hands, quick and disciplined, went rapidly, one to the left for the bag of crowns, the other to the right for the handle of his sword. Chicot opened his eyes wide. Darkness profound.

Then Chicot opened his ears, and it seemed to him as if the night was literally torn asunder by the combat of the four

winds, which were disputing the whole room, from the wardrobe, which continued to crush the table more and more, to the chairs, which rolled about and dashed against one another in falling on the other furniture.

It seemed to Chicot in the midst of all this hubbub that the four winds had entered his room in flesh and blood, and that he had business with Eurus, Notus, Aquilo, and Boreas, in person, with their puffy cheeks and especially their big feet. Resigned, because he realized that he could do nothing against the gods of Olympus, Chicot cowered down in a corner near his bed, like the son of Oileus after one of his great fits of fury which Homer relates.

But he held his long sword couched and sidewise of the wind or rather winds, so that if the mythological personages inconsiderately approached him they could run themselves through even, should the result be that of the wound given by Diomed to Venus.

But after a few minutes of the most abominable racket that ever rent the ear of man, Chicot profited by a momentary respite which the tempest gave him to dominate with his voice the unchained elements, and the furniture given up to a colloquy too noisy to be wholly natural.

Chicot shouted and vociferated.

"Help!"

At length he made so much noise by himself alone that the elements grew calm, as if Neptune in person had uttered the famous *Quos ego*, and after six or eight minutes, during which Eurus, Notus, Boreas, and Aquilo beat a retreat, the host appeared with a lantern, and threw light upon the drama. The scene which he had come to take part in presented a deplorable aspect, and which very much resembled a battlefield. The great wardrobe overturned upon the broken table showed the door without hinges, and which, held by one of its bolts alone, oscillated like the sail of a ship; the three or four chairs which completed the furniture had their backs overturned and their feet in the air; finally, the china which had decorated the table lay cracked and broken on the floor.

"Why, this place is hell!" cried Chicot, recognizing his host in the light of the lantern.

"Oh! monsieur," exclaimed the host, perceiving the frightful havoc which had just been made. "Oh! monsieur, what

has happened?" and he raised his hands and consequently his lantern towards Heaven.

"How many devils are staying with you, my friend, tell me?" roared Chicot.

"Oh! Jesus! what weather!" replied the host with the same pathetic gesture.

"But don't the bolts hold?" continued Chicot. "Is the house made of pasteboard? I would rather get out of this; I prefer the plain."

And Chicot came out from the corner of the bed and appeared, sword in hand, in the space left free between the foot of the bed and the wall.

"Oh, my poor furniture!" sighed the host.

"And my clothes!" cried Chicot; "where are my clothes, which were on this chair?"

"Your clothes, my dear monsieur?" said the host innocently; "if they were there, they must be there now."

"What! If they were there! But do you suppose," said Chicot, "that I came here yesterday in the costume in which you now see me?"

And Chicot strove, but in vain, to drape himself in his light tunic.

"My God! monsieur," replied the host, finding it hard to reply to such an argument, "I know very well that you wore clothes."

"It is fortunate that you agree to that."

"But" —

"But what?"

"The wind has opened everything, scattered everything."

"Ah! that is a reason?"

"You can easily see," said the host, quickly.

"But," resumed Chicot, "follow my calculations, dear friend. When the wind enters a place — and it must have entered here, must it not, to cause the disorder which I see about me?"

"Without a doubt."

"Well! when the wind enters a place, it must come from without."

"Yes, certainly, monsieur."

"You do not deny that?"

"No, that would be foolish."

"Well, then, the wind on entering here ought to bring the

clothes of others into my room, instead of taking mine I do not know where."

"Ah! yes, so it seems to me. But the proof of the contrary exists or seems to exist."

"Comrade," said Chicot, who had explored the floor with his investigating glance, "what road did the wind take to come to me here?"

"Pardon, monsieur?"

"I ask you from what direction the wind comes?"

"From the north, monsieur, from the north."

"Well! he has walked in the mud, for here are his foot-prints on the floor."

And Chicot indeed showed on the floor the recent traces of a muddy boot.

The host grew pale.

"Now, my dear fellow," said Chicot, "if I had any advice to offer you, it would be to watch this kind of wind which enters inns, penetrates into rooms by forcing the doors, and retires after stealing the clothes of travellers."

The host drew back two steps in order to free himself from all the overturned furniture and to gain the exit to the hall.

Then when he felt his retreat assured:

"Why do you call me a thief?" said he.

"Why! what have you done with your good-natured face?" asked Chicot; "I find you completely changed."

"I am changed because you insult me."

"I!"

"Yes, you call me a thief," replied the host, in a louder voice, which sounded very much like a threat.

"I call you thief because you are responsible for my clothes, and because my clothes have been stolen; you do not deny this?"

And it was Chicot, who, like a fencing-master sounding his adversary, made a threatening gesture.

"Holloa!" cried the host, "holloa!"

At this call four men armed with sticks appeared on the stairs.

"Ah! here are Eurus, Notus, Aquilo, and Boreas," said Chicot. "*Ventre de biche!* since opportunity offers, I will rid the earth of the North wind; it will be a service rendered to humanity; then there will be eternal spring."

And he gave such a fierce thrust with his long sword in the

direction of his nearest assailant that had not the latter, with the agility of a true son of Æolus, made a spring backwards, he would have been pierced through and through. Unfortunately, when making the spring he was looking at Chicot, and consequently, unable to see behind him, he fell on the edge of the upper step of the stairway, and, losing his centre of gravity, rolled, with great noise, down its entire length.

This retreat was a signal for the three others, who disappeared through the exit open before them or rather behind them with the swiftness of phantoms swallowed up in a trap.

But the last to vanish had had time while his companions were effecting their descent to say a few words in the ear of the host.

"Well! well!" grumbled the latter, "we will find your clothes."

"Well! that is all I ask."

"And they shall be brought to you."

"Very good; in order not to go naked this is a reasonable request, it seems to me."

In short, the clothes were brought, but were visibly the worse for wear.

"Oh! oh!" said Chicot, "there are a good many nails in your stairway. Devilish winds, to be sure! but after all, it is honorable amends. How could I suspect you? You have such an honest face!"

The host smiled pleasantly.

"And now," said he, "you will go to sleep again, I presume?"

"No, thanks; no, I have slept enough."

"What shall you do, then?"

"You will lend me your lantern, if you please, and I will go on with my reading," replied Chicot, in the same pleasant manner.

The host said nothing; he merely handed his lantern to Chicot and withdrew.

Chicot set the wardrobe up against the door and went back to bed.

The night was calm; the wind had died away, as if the sword of Chicot had penetrated the bottle which held it.

At daybreak the ambassador asked for his horse, paid his bill, and departed, saying:

"We shall see this evening."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

HOW CHICOT CONTINUED HIS JOURNEY AND WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM.

Chicot spent the whole morning congratulating himself for having had the coolness and the patience which we have described, during that night of trials.

"But," thought he, "they do not catch an old wolf twice in the same net; it is, therefore, almost certain that to-day they will invent some new deviltry for me; so let us be on our guard."

The result of this reasoning, full of wisdom, was that Chicot, during that day, made a march which Xenophon would not have found unworthy of immortalizing in his Retreat of the Ten Thousand.

Every tree, every rise of ground, every wall served him as a point of observation or natural fortification.

He even concluded, as he went along, alliances, if not offensive, at least defensive.

In short, four important grocers of Paris, who were going to Orleans to order their preserves from Cotignac, and their dried fruits from Limoges, deigned to be pleased with the society of Chicot, who passed himself off as a hosier of Bordeaux, returning home after having concluded his business. But as Chicot, a Gascon by birth, lost his accent only when the absence of this accent was particularly necessary to him, he inspired no distrust among his travelling companions.

This army, therefore, consisted of five masters and four grocers' clerks; it was no more to be despised for its wit than for its number, considering the warlike customs introduced from the League into the habits of the Parisian grocery.

We will not affirm that Chicot professed any great respect for the bravery of his companions, but then, certainly, the proverb is true which says that three cowards together are less than one brave man alone.

Chicot had no further fear, the moment he found himself with four cowards; he even scorned from that time to turn around, as he had before done, to see those who might be following him.

The result of this was that while discussing politics and

boasting a great deal they reached without hindrance the city where the troop was to sup and sleep.

They supped, drank hard, and each went to his room.

During the meal Chicot had been sparing neither of his jokes, which amused his companions, nor of the draughts of Muscatelle and Burgundy, which kept up his wit. They had poked fun among the merchants, that is, among free men, at his Majesty the King of France, and at all the other majesties, whether of Lorraine, Navarre, Flanders, or other places.

Chicot went to bed, after having promised to meet the four grocers the following day, and having been, so to speak, conducted to his room by them in triumph. Maître Chicot, therefore, found himself guarded like a prince, in his corridor, by the four travellers, whose four cells preceded his own, situated at the end of the passage, and consequently impregnable, thanks to the intermediate alliances. In short, as at this time the roads were far from safe, even for those who were charged only with their own business, each one assured himself of the support of his neighbor in case of mishap.

Chicot, who had not related his accidents of the previous night, had helped on, we can easily understand, the drawing up of this article of the treaty, which, for that matter, had been unanimously adopted. Chicot, therefore, without failing in his customary prudence, could go to bed and to sleep. He could do this much better, as he had from additional prudence examined the room minutely, pushed the bolts across his door, and closed the blinds of his window, the only one which the room had; it goes without saying that he had sounded the wall with his fist, and that everywhere the wall had returned a satisfactory answer.

During his first sleep, however, there happened an event which the Sphinx herself, that diviner of riddles, could never have foreseen; but the devil had set about to mix himself up in the affairs of Chicot, and the devil is more acute than all the Sphinxes in the world.

Towards half-past nine there came a timid knock at the door of the grocers' clerks, all four of whom were sleeping together in a sort of garret, above the corridor of the merchants, their employers. One of them awoke in very bad humor, and found himself face to face with the host.

"Gentlemen," said the latter, "I see with much pleasure that you have gone to bed in your clothes; I am going to do

you a great service. Your masters became heated at table in discussing politics. It seems that a sheriff of the town overheard them and repeated their remarks to the mayor; now, our city prides itself on being loyal; and the mayor has just sent the watch, who have seized your employers, and taken them to the Hôtel de Ville for an explanation. The prison is very near the Hôtel de Ville; my boys, get to your feet; your mules are waiting for you, your patrons will join you all right."

The four clerks bounded like deer, rushed down the staircase, jumped, trembling, on their mules, and set out for Paris, after having charged the host to inform their masters of their departure and of the direction taken, if it happened that they came back to the inn.

This done, and having seen the four fellows disappear around the corner of the street, the host, with the same precaution, knocked at the first door in the corridor.

He rapped so loud that the first merchant cried out in stentorian tones:

"Who is there?"

"Silence, wretched man!" replied the host; "come to the door, and walk on tiptoe."

The merchant obeyed, but as he was a prudent man he put his ear to the door instead of opening it, and asked:

"Who are you?"

"Do you not recognize the voice of your host?"

"That is true. Well! my God, what is the matter?"

"It seems that at table you spoke somewhat freely of the King, and the mayor has been informed of it by some spy, so that the watch have come. Fortunately, the idea came to me to point out the room of your clerks, so that he is busy arresting them up there, instead of arresting you here."

"Oh! oh! what are you telling me?" said the merchant.

"The truth, pure and simple. Hurry and save yourself while the stairway is free."

"But my companions?"

"Oh! you have not time to warn them."

"Poor fellows!"

And the merchant dressed hurriedly.

Meanwhile, the host, as though struck by a sudden inspiration, tapped with his finger on the partition which separated the first merchant from the second.

The second, awakened by the same words and the same

story, gently opened his door; the third, awakened by the second, called the fourth; and all four, as swift as a flight of swallows, vanished, raising their arms to Heaven and walking on the tips of their toes.

"That poor hosier," said they; "it is on him that everything will fall; but it is true that he said the most. Faith! Let him look out, for the host has not had time to warn him as he has us!"

In short, Maître Chicot, as we know, had been warned of nothing.

Just as the merchants fled, recommending him to God, he was sleeping his deepest sleep.

The host made sure of this by listening at the door; then he descended to a lower room, the door of which, carefully closed, opened at a signal from him. He took off his cap and entered.

The chamber was occupied by six armed men, one of whom seemed to have the right to command the others.

"Well?" said the latter.

"Well, Monsieur Officer, I have obeyed in every detail."

"Your inn is deserted?"

"Absolutely."

"The person we have indicated has not been warned or wakened?"

"Neither warned nor wakened."

"Monsieur Host, you know in whose name we act; you know what cause we serve, for you yourself are a defender of this cause?"

"Yes, certainly, monsieur; moreover, you see that in order to keep my oath I have sacrificed the money which my guests would have spent at my inn; but it says in this oath: 'I will sacrifice my goods to the defence of the holy Catholic religion.'"

"'And my life!' You forget that word," said the officer, in a haughty tone.

"My God!" cried the host, clasping his hands, "do you demand my life? I have a wife and children."

"We demand it only in case you do not blindly obey what you are ordered to do."

"Oh! I will obey; be sure."

"In that case, go to bed, close the doors, and whatever you may hear or see, do not come out, even if your house should

burn and fall down on your head. You see that your rôle is not difficult."

"Alas! alas! I am ruined," murmured the host.

"I am charged to indemnify you," said the officer; "take these thirty crowns."

"My house valued at thirty crowns!" cried the innkeeper, piteously.

"Well! good Lord! we won't break a single one of your windows, cry-baby that you are. Fie! a wretched champion of the holy League we have here!"

The host withdrew, and shut himself up like a bearer of a flag of truce informed of the sacking of the city. Then the officer ordered the two best armed men to station themselves under Chicot's window. He himself, with the three others, ascended to the chamber of this poor hosier, as his travelling companions, already far from the city, called him.

"You know the order," said the officer. "If he opens, if he lets himself be searched, if we find on him that for which we are looking, you must not do him the slightest injury; but if the contrary happens, a good blow of the dagger, you understand? no pistol, no rifle. Besides, that will be useless, being four against one."

They had reached the door.

The officer knocked.

"Who is there?" cried Chicot, awaking with a start.

"By Heaven!" said the officer, "let us be crafty. Your friends, the grocers, have something important to say to you."

"Oh! oh!" said Chicot, "last night's wine has greatly thickened your voices, my grocers."

The officer softened his voice and in the most insinuating tone:

"But open your door, dear companion and comrade."

"*Ventre de biche!* how your grocery smells of old iron!" said Chicot.

"Ah! you will not open!" cried the officer, impatiently; "come, then, break in the door!"

Chicot ran to the window, raised it, and saw below the two naked swords.

"I am caught!" he cried.

"Ah! ah! comrade," said the officer, who had heard the noise of the opening window, "you fear the perilous leap; you are right. Come, open the door for us, open!"

"Faith! no," said Chicot; "the door is solid and help will come to me when you make a noise."

The officer burst out laughing, and ordered the soldiers to take off the hinges.

Chicot began to shout to rouse the merchants.

"Idiot!" said the officer, "do you suppose that we have left you any help? Undeceive yourself, you are entirely alone, and consequently entirely lost! Come, have courage in your misfortune. Here, you others!"

And Chicot heard the butt-ends of three muskets strike against the door with the force and regularity of three battering-rams.

"There are," said he, "three muskets and one officer; below, two swords only; fifteen feet to jump, a trifle. I prefer swords to muskets."

And tying his bag to his belt, he mounted the window-sill without hesitation, holding his sword in hand. The two men below held their blades in the air.

But Chicot had guessed rightly. No man, were he a Goliath, would await the fall of a man, were he a pigmy, when this man might kill him in killing himself.

The soldiers changed their tactics and drew back, determined to strike Chicot when he had fallen.

This is what the Gascon had expected of them. He jumped like a clever man on his toes, and remained crouched. At the same instant one of the men gave him a blow with the point of his sword which would have pierced a wall.

But Chicot did not even take the trouble to parry. He received the blow full in his chest; but, thanks to Gorenflot's coat of mail, the blade of his enemy broke like glass.

"He is armed with a cuirass!" said one of the soldiers.

"By Heaven!" replied Chicot, who by a back stroke had already split open his head.

The other began to shout, thinking only of parrying, for Chicot was attacking him. Unfortunately, he had not even the strength of Jacques Clement. Chicot stretched him, at the second pass, by the side of his comrade.

So that, when the door was broken in, the officer, looking from the windows, saw only his two sentinels bathed in their blood.

Fifty feet from the dying men, Chicot was calmly escaping.

"He is a devil!" cried the officer; "he is proof against fire."

"Yes, but not against lead," said a soldier, taking aim at him.

"Wretched man!" cried the officer, turning aside the musket. "No noise! You will arouse the whole city; we will find him to-morrow."

"Ah! this is it," said one of the soldiers, philosophically; "four men should have been stationed below and only two above."

"You are a fool!" replied the officer.

"We shall see what Monsieur le Duc will tell him he is," grumbled the other, to console himself.

And he rested the butt-end of his musket on the ground.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THIRD DAY OF THE JOURNEY.

Chicot made his escape with such calmness only because he was at Etampes, that is to say, in a city, in the midst of a population, under the safeguard of a certain number of magistrates, who, at his first requisition, would have given free play to justice, and would have arrested Monsieur de Guise himself.

His assailants thoroughly understood their false position. So the officer, at the risk of letting Chicot escape, forbade his soldiers to use noisy arms. It was for the same reason that he refrained from pursuing Chicot, who at the first step taken to follow him would have uttered cries to arouse the whole city.

The small troop, reduced by a third, were enveloped in the darkness, and in order to compromise themselves the less, they abandoned the two dead men, leaving their swords with them, that it might be supposed they had killed each other. In the quarter, Chicot searched, but in vain, for his merchants and their clerks.

Then, as he rightly supposed that those with whom he had been dealing, seeing their attempt had failed, would not care to remain in the city, he thought that it would be fair play to remain there himself.

He did more; after having made a *détour*, and from the corner of a neighboring street having heard the horses' steps

die away, he had the audacity to return to the inn. He found the host, who had not yet recovered his composure, and who let him saddle his horse in the stable, watching him the while with the same astonishment that he would have had for a phantom.

Chicot took advantage of this friendly stupor not to pay his bill, which the host on his part was careful not to demand.

Then he went to finish the night in the large hall of another inn, in the midst of all the drinkers, who were far from suspecting that this great stranger, with the smiling face and gracious manner, although escaping being killed himself, had just killed two men.

Daybreak found him on the road, a prey to an anxiety which increased every instant. Two attempts had fortunately failed; a third might prove fatal to him. At this moment he would have compromised with all the guards, even to telling them the stories which he knew so well how to invent.

A cluster of trees gave him apprehensions difficult to describe; a ditch made shivers run up and down his back; a somewhat high wall came very near causing him to turn back. From time to time he resolved, once at Orleans, to send a courier to the King, to demand an escort from city to city.

But as the road as far as Orleans was deserted and perfectly safe, Chicot thought that he would needlessly appear like a coward, that the King would lose his good opinion of Chicot, and that an escort would be very troublesome; besides, a hundred ditches, fifty hedges, twenty walls, and ten copses had already been passed without the least object of suspicion having appeared under the branches or on the stones.

But beyond Orleans Chicot felt his terror increase; four o'clock was approaching, that is, evening. The road was dark with trees, and ascended like a ladder; the traveller, alone on the grayish road, seemed like a Moorish target, to whoever might feel a desire to send him a musket-ball.

Suddenly, in the distance Chicot heard a sound which resembled that which galloping horses make on dry ground. He turned, and at the foot of the hill, the half of which he had climbed, he saw some horsemen ascending at full speed.

He counted them; there were seven.

Four had muskets on their shoulders.

The sinking sun drew from each barrel a long, blood-red beam. The horses of these riders were gaining rapidly on

Chicot's horse. Chicot, moreover, did not care to engage in a contest for speed, the result of which would have been to diminish his resources in case of attack. He merely made his horse go zigzag, in order to change the position of the point arrived at by the gunners. It was not without accurate knowledge of the musket in general, and musketeers in particular, that Chicot resorted to this manœuvre; for at the moment when the horsemen were fifty feet from him, he was saluted with four shots, which, following the direction from which the riders fired, passed directly over his head.

As we have seen, Chicot expected these four musket-shots; therefore he had formed his plan in advance. On hearing the balls whistle, he dropped the reins and let himself slip down from his horse. He had taken the precaution to draw his sword from the sheath, and held in his left hand a dagger as sharp as a razor and as pointed as a needle.

He dropped, therefore, we say, and in such a manner that his limbs were springs, bent but ready to unfold; at the same time, thanks to the position gained by his fall, his head was protected by the breast of his horse.

A cry of joy rose from the group of horsemen, who seeing Chicot fall thought him dead.

"I told you so, idiots," said a masked man, riding up at a gallop; "you have lost everything because you did not strictly follow my orders. This time he is down; dead or alive search him, and if he stirs, let him be finished."

"Yes, monsieur," replied one of the troopers, respectfully.

And each dismounted, with the exception of one soldier who held all the bridles and looked after the horses.

Chicot was not exactly a pious man; but at that moment he thought there was a God, that this God was opening his arms to him, and that within five minutes, perhaps, the sinner would be before his Judge. He murmured a sad and fervent prayer, which was certainly heard above.

Two men approached Chicot; both held swords in their hands. They clearly perceived that Chicot was not dead from the manner in which he was groaning. As he did not move and in no way prepared to defend himself the more zealous of the two had the imprudence to approach within reach of his left hand; at once the dagger, pushed forward as though by a lever, entered his throat, on which the blade stamped itself as on soft wax. At the same time the half of the sword, which

was in Chicot's right hand, disappeared in the back of the second cavalier, who was trying to escape.

"By Heaven!" cried the leader, "there is treason here! Load the muskets; the fellow is still very much alive."

"Yes, indeed, I am still alive," said Chicot, whose eyes shot fire, and quick as thought he threw himself on the chief cavalier, thrusting the point of his sword at his mask.

But already two soldiers had surrounded him; he turned, split open a thigh of one with a great thrust of his sword, and freed himself.

"Boys! boys!" cried the chief, "the muskets, by Heaven!"

"Before your muskets are ready," said Chicot, "I shall have opened your entrails, brigand, and I shall have cut the cords of your mask, that I may know who you are."

"Stand firm, monsieur, stand firm, and I will defend you," said a voice which seemed to Chicot to come from Heaven.

It was that of a handsome young man mounted on a fine black horse. He had two pistols in his hand, and cried out to Chicot:

"Stoop down, stoop down, by Heaven! stoop down, I tell you!"

Chicot obeyed.

A pistol shot resounded, and a man rolled at Chicot's feet, letting fall his sword.

The horses were struggling; the three surviving cavaliers strove to find their stirrups, but could not; the young man fired a second pistol shot into the midst of the confusion, and another man fell.

"Two to two," said Chicot; "generous protector, take yours, this is mine."

And he fell upon the masked horseman, who, trembling with rage or fear, held his ground, however, like a man accustomed to the handling of arms.

On his part, the young man had seized his enemy round the waist, and had hurled him to the ground without even taking his sword in his hand. Then he bound him with his belt, like a sheep in the slaughter-house.

Chicot, seeing himself opposite a single adversary, recovered his coolness and consequently his superiority.

He rushed at once upon his opponent, who was endowed with rather ample corpulence, ran him into a ditch along the road,

and upon a second feint gave him a thrust with the point of his sword in the middle of his back.

The man fell.

Chicot placed his foot on the vanquished man's sword, so that he could not recover possession of it, and with his dagger cut the cords of the mask.

"Monsieur de Mayenne!" said he; "*ventre de biche!* I suspected it."

The duke did not reply; he had fainted, partly from loss of blood, partly from the weight of his fall.

Chicot scratched his nose, as was his habit when he had to carry out any act of great importance; then after an instant's reflection, he rolled up his sleeve, took his large dagger, and approached the duke to cut off his head, pure and simple. But he felt an arm of iron pressing his, and heard a voice saying to him:

"Needless, monsieur! we do not kill a fallen enemy."

"Young man," replied Chicot, "you have saved my life, it is true; I thank you with all my heart; but accept a little lesson that may be very useful in these times of moral degradation in which we live. When a man has suffered three attacks in three days, when he has three times risked his life, when he is still warm with the blood of enemies who without any provocation whatsoever on his part fired at him from afar four shots of a musket, as they might have done to a mad wolf, then, young man, this valiant fellow, allow me to tell you, may boldly do what I am about to do."

And Chicot seized the neck of his enemy in order to finish his work.

But this time again the young man stopped him.

"You will not do it, monsieur, at least while I am here. We do not spill blood in this way by the wholesale, like that which is coming from the wound you have already made."

"Bah!" said Chicot in surprise; "you know this wretch?"

"This wretch is Monsieur le Duc de Mayenne, a prince equal in nobility to many a king."

"All the more reason," said Chicot, in a sombre voice. "But you, who are you?"

"I am he who saved your life, monsieur," replied the young man coldly.

"And who, three days ago, on the road to Charenton, if I am not mistaken, gave me a letter from the King?"

"Exactly."

"Then you are in the service of the King, monsieur?"

"I have that honor," replied the young man, bowing.

"And, being in the service of the King, you spare Monsieur de Mayenne? By Heaven, Monsieur, permit me to say to you, that is not being a good servant."

"I think, on the contrary, that it is I who am the good servant of the King just now."

"Perhaps," said Chicot, sadly, "perhaps, but this is not a moment for philosophizing. What is your name?"

"Ernauton de Carmainges, monsieur."

"Well! Monsieur Ernauton, what shall we do with this carrion equal in nobility to all the kings on earth? for, as for myself, I shall make for the fields, I warn you."

"I will watch over Monsieur de Mayenne, monsieur."

"And his companion who is listening yonder, what shall you do with him?"

"The poor devil hears nothing; I strapped him too tight, according to my thinking, and he has fainted."

"Well, Monsieur de Carmainges, you have saved my life to-day, but you compromise it furiously for later on."

"I do my duty to-day; God will take care of the future."

"Let it be as you please, then. Besides, it goes against me to kill this defenceless man, although he is my most cruel enemy. So, adieu, monsieur."

And Chicot pressed Ernauton's hand.

"Perhaps he is right," said he to himself, going back to his horse.

Then retracing his steps:

"As a matter of fact," said he, "you have seven good horses here; I think I have won four of them for myself; help me, then, to choose from them. You know them?"

"Take mine," replied Ernauton, "I know what he can do."

"Oh! that is too much generosity, keep him for yourself."

"No, I have not as much need as you of riding fast."

Chicot was not used to being urged; he threw himself on Ernauton's horse and disappeared.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ERNAUTON DE CARMAINGES.

Ernauton remained on the field of battle, greatly embarrassed as to what he should do with the two enemies who were about to open their eyes in his arms. In the meantime, as there was no danger of their escaping, and as it was probable that Maître Robert Briquet (it was by this name, we may remember, that Ernauton knew Chicot), and as it was probable, we say, that Maître Robert Briquet would not return to make way with them, the young man set out in search of help, and was not slow in finding what he sought on that very road.

A wagon which must have passed Chicot on the way appeared at the top of the hill, standing out boldly against a sky reddened by the fires of the setting sun. This wagon was drawn by two oxen and led by a peasant. Ernauton hailed the driver, who, on perceiving him, had had a great desire to leave his wagon and flee into the copse, and told him that a combat had just taken place between Huguenots and Catholics; that this combat had been fatal to four of them, and that two had survived. The peasant, greatly terrified at the responsibility of such a task, but still more frightened, as we have said, by the warlike appearance of Ernauton, aided the young man in lifting Monsieur de Mayenne into the wagon, and then the soldier, who, unconscious or not, still kept his eyes closed. The four dead cavaliers were left behind.

"Monsieur," said the peasant, "were these four men Catholics or Huguenots?"

Ernauton had seen the peasant, in his fright, make the sign of the cross.

"Huguenots," said he.

"In that case," continued the peasant, "there would be no harm in my searching them, would there?"

"None," replied Ernauton, who was just as willing for the peasant with whom he was dealing to be the heir as the next passer-by.

The peasant did not wait to be told twice and turned the pockets of the dead men inside out. The dead had had good pay while alive, apparently, for, the operation over, the brow of the peasant lighted up. There resulted a joy which spread

at once through his body and soul so that he urged on his oxen more briskly in order the more quickly to reach his hut.

It was in the stable of this excellent Catholic, on a good bed of straw, that Monsieur de Mayenne regained consciousness. The pain caused by the jolting of the wagon had not succeeded in reviving him; but when some fresh water, sprinkled on the wound, caused some drops of red blood to flow, the duke opened his eyes and looked at the men and objects around him with a surprise easy to imagine.

As soon as Monsieur de Mayenne had opened his eyes Ernauton dismissed the peasant.

"Who are you, monsieur?" asked Mayenne.

Ernauton smiled.

"Do you not recognize me, monsieur?" said he.

"Yes," replied the duke, frowning, "you are the one who came to the assistance of my enemy."

"Yes," returned Ernauton; "but I am also the one who prevented your enemy from killing you."

"That must be so," said Mayenne, "since I am living, unless, however, he thought me dead."

"He went away knowing you were alive, monsieur."

"At least, he thought my wound mortal."

"I do not know, but in any case, had I not interfered, he would have given you one which would have been so."

"But, monsieur, why did you assist in killing my men, in order afterwards to prevent this man from killing me?"

"Nothing is more simple, monsieur, and I am surprised that a gentleman such as you seem to me to be should not understand my conduct. Chance led me to the road you were following; I saw several men attacking one alone, I defended the single man; then, when this brave fellow to whose assistance I had gone, for, whoever he is, monsieur, the man is brave,—then, when this brave fellow, left face to face with you, had decided the victory by the blow which laid you low, seeing that he was about to take advantage of the victory by killing you, I interposed with my sword."

"You know me, then?" asked Mayenne, with a scrutinizing glance.

"I have no wish to know you, monsieur; I know that you are a wounded man, and that is enough for me."

"Be frank, monsieur," said Mayenne, "you know me?"

"It is strange, monsieur, that you are not willing to under-

stand me. As for myself, I do not consider it any more noble to kill a defenceless man than for six men to attack one who is passing by."

"You will admit, however, that there might be reasons for anything?"

Ernauton bowed, but did not reply.

"Did you not perceive," continued Mayenne, "that I crossed swords alone with this man?"

"I saw that; it is true."

"Besides, this man is my most mortal enemy."

"I believe that, for he said the same of you."

"And if I survive my wound?"

"That does not concern me. You will do as you please, monsieur."

"Do you think me very seriously wounded?"

"I have examined your wound, monsieur, and I think that, although serious, there is no danger of death. The steel glided along the ribs, I believe, and did not penetrate the chest. Take a breath, and I think you will feel no pain in your lungs."

Mayenne breathed, painfully, but without inward suffering.

"That is true," said he; "but the men who were with me?"

"Are dead with the exception of one."

"Were they left on the road?" asked Mayenne.

"Yes."

"Were they searched?"

"The peasant whom you must have seen on opening your eyes, and who is your host, acquitted himself of that task."

"What did he find on them?"

"Some silver."

"And papers?"

"I do not know."

"Ah!" said Mayenne, with evident satisfaction.

"For the rest, you can gain information from the man who lives."

"But where is the one who lives?"

"In the barn, two feet from here."

"Take me to him, or rather, bring him to me, and if you are an honorable man, as I believe, swear to me that you will ask him no questions."

"I am not curious, monsieur, and, as far as this affair is concerned, I know all that it is necessary for me to know."

The duke still gazed at Ernauton with anxiety.

"Monsieur," said the latter, "I should be pleased if you would charge some one else with the commission you wish to give me."

"I am wrong, monsieur, and I acknowledge it," said Mayenne. "Have the extreme kindness to render me the service I ask of you."

Five minutes later the soldier entered the stable.

He gave a cry on seeing the Duke de Mayenne, but the latter had the strength to lay his finger on his lips; the soldier at once grew silent.

"Monsieur," said Mayenne to Ernauton, "my gratitude will be everlasting, and no doubt, some day, we shall meet under happier circumstances. May I ask you to whom I have the honor of speaking?"

"I am the Vicomte Ernauton de Carmainges, monsieur."

Mayenne expected more details, but it was the young man's turn to be reserved.

"You were going to Beaugency, monsieur?" continued Mayenne.

"Yes, monsieur."

"Then I have inconvenienced you, and you cannot ride further to-night, perhaps?"

"On the contrary, monsieur, I count on resuming my journey at once."

"For Beaugency?"

Ernauton looked at Mayenne like a man whom this insistence greatly annoyed.

"For Paris," said he.

The duke seemed surprised.

"Pardon," continued Mayenne, "but it is strange that going to Beaugency, and being stopped by an unforeseen circumstance, you give up the object of your journey, without a serious reason."

"Nothing is simpler, monsieur," replied Ernauton; "I was going to keep an appointment. Our meeting, which forced me to stop here, has caused me to fail in keeping this appointment; I shall return, therefore."

Mayenne strove in vain to read on the impassible face of Ernauton another thought than that expressed by his words.

"Oh! monsieur," said he, finally, "why will you not stay with me a few days? I will send to Paris by this soldier for

a surgeon, for you see, do you not, that I cannot stay alone with these peasants, who are unknown to me?"

"And why, monsieur," replied Ernauton, "should your soldier not remain with you, and I send you a surgeon?"

Mayenne hesitated.

"Do you know the name of my enemy?" he asked.

"No, monsieur."

"What! you saved his life, and he did not tell you his name?"

"I did not ask it of him."

"You did not ask it of him?"

"I saved your life also, monsieur; have I, for that, asked your name? but, in return, you both know mine. What difference does it make if the deliverer know the name of his debtor or not? It is the debtor who should know that of his deliverer."

"I see, monsieur," said Mayenne, "that there is nothing to be learned from you, and that you are as discreet as you are brave."

"And I, monsieur, I see that you utter those words with intended reproach, and I regret it; for, in truth, that which alarms you should, on the contrary, reassure you. One is not very discreet in one thing without being a little so in another."

"You are right; your hand, Monsieur de Carmainges."

Ernauton gave him his hand; but without anything in his manner to show that he knew he was giving it to a prince.

"You have taken exception to my conduct, monsieur," continued Mayenne; "I cannot justify myself without revealing important secrets. It is better, I think, that we carry our confidences no further."

"Note, monsieur," replied Ernauton, "that you are defending yourself without my having accused you. You are perfectly free, believe me, to speak or keep silent."

"Thanks, monsieur, I will keep silent. But know that I am a gentleman of good family, in a position to do you any favor I might wish to do."

"Let us stop there, monsieur," replied Ernauton, "and believe that I shall be as discreet in regard to your influence as I have been in regard to your name. Thanks to the master I serve, I have need of no one."

"Your master?" asked Mayenne, anxiously, "what master, if you please?"

"Oh! no more confidences, you said so yourself, monsieur," replied Ernauton.

"That is fair."

"And since your wound is beginning to grow inflamed, speak less, monsieur, I beg of you."

"You are right. Oh! I must have my surgeon."

"I am returning to Paris, as I have had the honor of telling you; give me his address."

Mayenne made a sign to the soldier, who approached; thereupon both talked in low tones. With his customary discretion, Ernauton moved away. At length, after a few moments' consultation, the duke turned to Ernauton.

"Monsieur de Carmainges," said he, "your word of honor that if I give you a letter for some one, this letter will be faithfully delivered to that person."

"I give it, monsieur."

"And I believe it; you are too gallant a man for me not to trust you blindly."

Ernauton bowed.

"I will confide to you a part of my secret," said Mayenne. "I am one of the guards of Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier."

"Ah!" said Ernauton, innocently, "Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier has guards? I did not know it."

"In these troublesome times, monsieur," replied Mayenne, "every one surrounds himself as best he may, and the house of De Guise being a royal house" —

"I do not ask for an explanation, monsieur. You belong to the guards of Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier; that is enough for me."

"I will resume, then: I was charged with a mission which necessitated my making a journey to Amboise, when, on the road, I met my enemy. You know the rest."

"Yes," said Ernauton.

"Stopped by this wound before accomplishing my mission, I ought to let Madame la Duchesse know the reason for my delay."

"That is right."

"Therefore you will deliver to her, into her own hands, the letter which I will have the honor of writing to her."

"If, indeed, there be ink and paper here," replied Ernauton, rising in search of these articles.

"Never mind," said Mayenne; "my soldier must have my tablets about him."

In fact, the soldier drew from his pocket some closed tablets. Mayenne turned to the wall to press a spring, the tablets opened; he wrote a few lines in pencil, and closed the tablets in the same mysterious way.

Once closed, it was impossible to open them, if one was ignorant of the secret, except by breaking them.

"Monsieur," said the young man, "in three days these tablets shall be delivered."

"Into her own hands?"

"To Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier herself."

The duke pressed the hand of his kind companion, and worn out both by the conversation in which he had just taken part, and by the letter which he had written, he fell back on the fresh straw, the perspiration on his brow.

"Monsieur," said the soldier, in a tongue which seemed to Ernauton but little in harmony with his costume, "monsieur, you bound me like a calf, it is true, but, whether you wish it or not, I regard these bonds as a chain of friendship, and will prove it to you in proper time and place."

And he held out a hand, the whiteness of which the young man had already noticed.

"So be it," said Carmainges, smiling; "behold me then with two extra friends."

"Do not joke, monsieur," said the soldier, "one never has too many."

"That is true, comrade," replied Ernauton.

And he departed.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE COURT OF THE HORSES.

Ernauton set out at once, and as he had taken the duke's horse in place of his own which he had given to Robert Briquet, he rode rapidly, so that by noon of the third day he reached Paris. At three o'clock in the afternoon he entered the Louvre, and the lodgings of the Forty-Five.

No event of importance marked his return.

The Gascons, seeing him, uttered shouts of surprise.

At these shouts Monsieur de Loignac entered, and perceiving Ernauton, assumed his most frowning expression, which did not prevent Ernauton from going straight to him.

Monsieur de Loignac signed to the young man to pass into the little cabinet situated at the end of the dormitory, a sort of audience-hall, in which this judge, without appeal, rendered his decisions.

"Is this the way to act, monsieur?" said he at once; "if I count correctly you have been absent five days and five nights, and it was you, monsieur, whom I thought one of the most reasonable, who has set the example of such breach of discipline."

"Monsieur," replied Ernauton, bowing, "I have done what I was told to do."

"And what were you told to do?"

"I was told to follow Monsieur de Mayenne, and I have followed him."

"For five days and five nights?"

"For five days and five nights, monsieur."

"The duke left Paris, then?"

"That same evening, and it seemed to me suspicious."

"You were right, monsieur. And then?"

Thereupon Ernauton began to relate briefly, but with the warmth and energy of a man of spirit, the adventure on the road, and the results which this adventure brought about. As he advanced in his story, the changeable face of De Loignac grew light with every impression which the narrator roused in his soul.

But when Ernauton came to the letter entrusted to his care by Monsieur de Mayenne:

"You have this letter?" cried Monsieur de Loignac.

"Yes, monsieur."

"The devil! this deserves some attention," said the captain; "wait for me, monsieur, or rather come with me, I beg of you."

Ernauton let himself be led, and arrived with De Loignac at the Court of the Horses of the Louvre.

Everything was preparing for the King's going out; equipages were being made ready; Monsieur D'Épernon was watching them try two new horses, recently sent from England, a present from Elizabeth to Henry; these two horses, remarkably harmonious in size and shape, were that very day to be harnessed to the King's carriage for the first time.

While Ernauton waited at the entrance of the court, Monsieur de Loignac approached Monsieur d'Épernon and touched the hem of his cloak.

"News, Monsieur le Duc!" said he, "important news!"

The duke left the group in which he was standing and approached the stairway by which the King was to descend.

"Tell me, Monsieur de Loignac, tell me."

"Monsieur de Carmainges has arrived from beyond Orleans; Monsieur de Mayenne is in a village seriously wounded."

The duke uttered an exclamation.

"Wounded!" he cried.

"And more," continued De Loignac, "he has written to Madame de Montpensier a letter which Monsieur de Carmainges has in his pocket."

"Oh! oh!" exclaimed D'Épernon. "*Parfandious!* bring Monsieur de Carmainges here, that I may speak to him."

De Loignac took hold of the hand of Ernauton, who, as we have said, was standing aside, out of respect, during the colloquy of his chiefs.

"Monsieur le Duc," said he, "here is our traveller."

"Good, monsieur. You have, it seems, a letter from Monsieur le Duc de Mayenne?" said D'Épernon.

"Yes, my lord."

"Written in a small village near Orleans?"

"Yes, my lord."

"And addressed to Madame de Montpensier?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Kindly give me this letter, if you please."

And the duke extended his hand with the easy negligence of a man who thinks he need but express his wishes, whatever they be, in order to have them obeyed.

"Pardon, my lord," said Carmainges, "but did you tell me to give you the letter from Monsieur de Mayenne to his sister?"

"Yes."

"Monsieur le Duc forgets that this letter was entrusted to me."

"What does that matter?"

"It matters greatly, my lord. I gave my word to Monsieur le Duc that this letter should be delivered to the duchess herself."

"Do you belong to the King or to Monsieur de Mayenne?"

"I belong to the King, my lord."

"Well, the King desires to see this letter."

"My lord, you are not the King."

"In truth, I think that you forget to whom you are speaking, Monsieur de Carmainges!" said D'Épernon, pale with anger.

"I remember perfectly, my lord, on the contrary, and that is why I refuse."

"You refuse; you said that you refused, I believe, Monsieur de Carmainges."

"That is what I said."

"Monsieur de Carmainges, you forget your oath of fidelity."

"My lord, up to the present time, so far as I know, I have sworn fidelity to but one person, and this person is his Majesty. If the King demands the letter of me, he shall have it, for the King is my master; but the King is not here."

"Monsieur de Carmainges," said the duke, who was visibly losing all self control, while Ernauton, on the contrary, seemed to grow cooler the more he resisted; "Monsieur de Carmainges, you are, like every one in your country, blind in prosperity; your fortune dazzles you, my little gentleman; the possession of a state secret stuns you like a heavy blow."

"That which stuns me, Monsieur le Duc, is the disgrace in which I am about to fall with your lordship, but not my fortune, which my refusal to obey you renders dubious. But it makes no difference, I do what I ought to do, and shall do nothing but that, and no one except the King shall have the letter you demand of me, unless it be the person to whom it is addressed."

Monsieur D'Épernon made a terrible movement.

"De Loignac," said he, "you will at once have Monsieur de Carmainges put into the dungeon."

"It is certain that by this means," said Carmainges, smiling, "I cannot deliver to Madame de Montpensier the letter of which I am the bearer, at least so long as I remain in this dungeon, but once out" —

"If you come out," said D'Épernon.

"I shall come out, monsieur, unless you have me murdered there," said Ernauton, with a determination, which, as he spoke, became cooler and more terrible; "yes, I shall come out, its walls are less firm than my will. So, monsieur, once out" —

"Well! once out?"

"Well, I shall speak to the King, and the King will answer me."

"To the dungeon! to the dungeon!" thundered D'Épernon, losing all control of himself; "to the dungeon, and have his letter taken from him!"

"No one shall touch it!" cried Ernauton, springing back and drawing from his breast the tablets of Mayenne. "I will tear this letter in pieces, since I can save it only at this price; and Monsieur de Mayenne will approve my doing this, and his Majesty will pardon me."

And in fact, the young man in his loyal resistance was about to tear the precious envelope in two when a hand gently arrested his arm. If the pressure had been violent, no doubt the young man would have redoubled his efforts to destroy the letter, but seeing that discretion was used, he stopped and looked over his shoulder.

"The King!" said he.

In fact, the King, on leaving the Louvre, had descended the stairway, and having paused for an instant on the last step, had heard the end of the discussion, and his royal arm had stayed that of Carmainges.

"What is the matter, gentlemen?" he demanded, in that tone to which he knew how to give, when he so desired, royal authority.

"It seems, sire," cried D'Épernon, without taking the trouble to hide his anger, "it seems that this man, one of your Forty-Five Guardsmen (for that matter, he is about to cease to be one), it seems, I say, that having been sent by me in your name to watch Monsieur de Mayenne during his stay in Paris, he followed him beyond Orleans, and there received from him a letter addressed to Madame de Montpensier."

"You received from Monsieur de Mayenne a letter for Madame de Montpensier?" demanded the King.

"Yes, sire," replied Ernauton; "but Monsieur le Duc d'Épernon does not tell you under what circumstances."

"Well! this letter," demanded the King, "where is it?"

"That is exactly the cause of the trouble, sire; Monsieur de Carmainges refuses absolutely to give it to me, and wishes to carry it to its address, a refusal which shows he is a poor servant, according to my way of thinking."

The King looked at Carmainges. The young man bent one knee to the ground.

"Sire," said he, "I am a poor gentleman, an honorable man, that is all. I saved the life of your messenger, whom Monsieur de Mayenne and five of his companions were about to assassinate, for, arriving in time, I caused the chances of the combat to turn in his favor."

"And in this combat did anything happen to Monsieur de Mayenne?" asked the King.

"Yes, sire, he was wounded, and even seriously."

"Good!" said the King, "and then?"

"Then, sire?"

"Yes."

"Your messenger, who seems to have some private reasons for hatred against Monsieur de Mayenne" —

The King smiled.

"Your messenger, sire, wished to make way with his enemy; perhaps he had the right to do so, but I thought that in my presence, that is, in the presence of a man whose sword belongs to your Majesty, this vengeance would be a political assassination, and" —

Ernauton hesitated.

"Finish," said the King.

"And I saved Monsieur de Mayenne from your messenger, as I had saved your messenger from Monsieur de Mayenne."

D'Épernon shrugged his shoulders, De Loignac bit his long mustache, the King stood unmoved.

"Continue," said he.

"Monsieur de Mayenne, reduced to a single companion, the four others having been killed, Monsieur de Mayenne, reduced, I say, to a single companion, was unwilling to be separated from him, and not knowing that I belonged to your Majesty, trusted in me and requested me to carry a letter to his sister. I have this letter; here it is; I offer it to your Majesty, sire, in order that you may dispose of it as you may dispose of me. My honor is dear to me, sire, but from the moment I have the guarantee of the royal will for answer to my conscience, I renounce my honor; it is in good hands."

Ernauton, still kneeling, held out the tablets to the King.

The King pushed them aside gently with his hand.

"What were you saying, then, D'Épernon? Monsieur de Carnainges is an honest man and a faithful servant."

"I, sire?" said D'Épernon. "Your Majesty asks what I was saying?"

"Yes; did I not hear as I came down the staircase the word 'dungeon'? By Heaven! quite the contrary, when one chances to meet a man like Monsieur de Carmainges, one should speak, as did the ancient Romans, of crowns and rewards. A letter always belongs to the one who carries it, duke, or to the one to whom it is carried."

D'Épernon bowed, grumbling.

"You will deliver your letter, Monsieur de Carmainges."

"But, sire, think of what it may contain," said D'Épernon. "Do not play with delicacy, when it is a question of your Majesty's life."

"You will deliver your letter, Monsieur de Carmainges," went on the King, without replying to his favorite.

"Thank you, sire," said Carmainges, preparing to withdraw.

"Where do you deliver it?"

"To Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier, I thought I had had the honor of telling your Majesty."

"I do not make myself clear. To what address? I mean is it to the Hôtel de Guise, to the Hôtel Saint Denis, or to Bel"—

A glance from D'Épernon stopped the King.

"I have no particular instruction from Monsieur de Mayenne on this subject, sire; I will carry the letter to the Hôtel de Guise, and there I shall find out where Madame de Montpensier is."

"Then you will set out in search of the duchess?"

"Yes, sire."

"And having found her?"

"I will give her my message."

"That is right. Now, Monsieur de Carmainges"—

And the King regarded the young man steadily.

"Sire?"

"Have you sworn or promised anything more to Monsieur de Mayenne than to deliver this letter into the hands of his sister?"

"No, sire."

"You did not promise, for instance," insisted the King, "something like secrecy as to the place in which you might find the duchess?"

"No, sire, I promised nothing like it."

"I shall impose on you, then, one sole condition, monsieur."

"Sire, I am your Majesty's slave."

"You will deliver this letter to Madame de Montpensier, and as soon as this is done you will join me at Vincennes, where I shall be this evening."

"Yes, sire."

"And you will give me a faithful account as to where you have found the duchess?"

"Sire, your Majesty may count on it."

"Without other explanation or confidence, you understand?"

"Sire, I promise."

"What imprudence!" said Duke d'Épernon. "Oh, sire!"

"You do not know men, duke, or at least certain men. This one is loyal to Mayenne; therefore he will be loyal to me."

"To you, sire!" cried Ernauton, "I will be more than loyal, I will be devoted."

"Now, D'Épernon," said the King, "no quarrels here, and you will at once pardon this brave servant for what you regarded as a lack of devotion, and what I regard as a proof of loyalty."

"Sire," said Carmainges, "Monsieur le Duc d'Épernon is too superior a man not to have seen in the midst of my disobedience to his orders, a disobedience for which I express to him my every regret, how I respect and love him; but before all else, I did what I considered my duty."

"*Parfandious!*" said the duke, changing the expression of his face with the same ease as a man would have taken off or put on a mask, "this is a test which does you honor, my dear Carmainges, and you are, in truth, a fine fellow; is he not, De Loignac? But, in the meantime, we gave him a good fright."

And the duke burst out laughing. De Loignac turned on his heels, in order not to answer; he did not feel, thorough Gascon though he was, that he had the strength to lie with the same effrontery as his illustrious chief.

"It was a test?" said the King, doubtfully; "so much the better, D'Épernon, if it was a test; but I do not advise you to use these tests with every one, too many would succumb to them."

"So much the better!" repeated Carmainges in his turn, "so much the better, Monsieur le Duc, if it is a test; I am sure, then, of the kind pardon of my lord."

But, as he said these words, the young man also seemed as little disposed to believe as the King.

"Well! now that everything is settled, gentlemen," said Henry, "let us go."

D'Épernon bowed.

"You are coming with me, duke?"

"I am to accompany your Majesty on horseback; such is the order you gave, I believe."

"Yes. Who is to be at the other coach-door?"

"A devoted servant of your Majesty," said D'Épernon, — "Monsieur de Sainte Maline."

And he watched the effect this name produced on Ernauton.

Ernauton remained impassive.

"De Loignac," he added, "call Monsieur de Sainte Maline."

"Monsieur de Carmainges," said the King, who understood the intention of the Duc d'Épernon, "you will carry out your commission, will you not, and return at once to Vincennes?"

"Yes, sire."

And Ernauton, in spite of all his philosophy, set out, pleased enough not to be present at the triumph which would so greatly cause the ambitious heart of Sainte Maline to rejoice.

CHAPTER XL.

THE SEVEN SINS OF MAGDALENE.

The King had glanced at his horses, and seeing them so strong and so skittish, he had been unwilling to risk the carriage by himself; consequently, after having given full justice, as we have seen, to Ernauton, he had signed to the duke to take a seat in his coach.

De Loignac and Sainte Maline took their places at the doors; a single outrider went in advance.

The duke was given a place by himself on the front of the massive carriage, and the King, with all his dogs, installed himself among the cushions at the back.

Among all these dogs there was a favorite; it was the one we saw in Henry's arms in his box at the Hôtel de Ville, and which had its special cushion, on which it was sleeping gently. At the right of the King was a table, the feet of which were

fixed to the floor of the coach; this table was covered with illuminated designs, which his Majesty cut out with marvellous skill, in spite of the jolting of the carriage.

They were for the most part sacred subjects. But as at this time there was in religion a somewhat tolerant mixture of pagan ideas, mythology was rather well represented in the religious designs of the King.

For the moment, Henry, always methodical, had made a choice among all these designs, and was occupied in cutting out the life of Magdalene, the sinner.

The subject in itself was picturesque, and the imagination of the artist had further added to the natural inclination of the subject. Magdalene was there, beautiful, young, and fêted; sumptuous baths, balls, and pleasures of all kinds figured in the collection.

The artist had had the ingenious idea, as Callot had later in his *Temptation of Saint Anthony*, — the artist, we say, had had the ingenious idea of covering the fancies of his brush with the legitimate mantle of ecclesiastical authority; so each design, with the current title of the seven capital sins, was explained by a special legend:

"Magdalene yielding to the sin of anger."

"Magdalene yielding to the sin of gluttony."

"Magdalene yielding to the sin of pride."

"Magdalene yielding to the sin of lust."

And so on, to the seventh and last capital sin.

The picture which the King was occupied in cutting out as they passed the Porte Saint Antoine represented Magdalene yielding to the sin of anger.

The beautiful sinner, half reclining on cushions, and without other covering than the magnificent golden hair with which later she was to wipe the perfumed feet of Christ, — the beautiful sinner, we say, was having a slave who had broken a precious vase thrown into a fish-pond on the right, filled with lampreys, the greedy heads of which were seen rising from the water like the heads of so many serpents, while on the left she was having beaten a woman (still more scantily clothed than herself, and wearing her hair in a knot) who, in arranging her mistress's locks, had pulled out some of those magnificent hairs, the profusion of which should have made Magdalene more indulgent to a fault of that kind.

The background of the picture represented dogs being beaten

for having let pass with impunity some poor beggars who were seeking alms, and roosters being strangled for having sung too loud and too early.

On reaching the Faubin Cross the King had finished cutting out all the figures in this picture, and was preparing to turn to the one entitled "Magdalene yielding to the sin of gluttony."

This represented the beautiful sinner reclining on one of those couches of purple and gold on which the ancients took their repasts; the table was ornamented with everything that the Roman gastronomers knew of the choicest in meats, fish, and fruits, from dormice in honey and mullets with Falerno, to lobsters from Stromboli and pomegranates from Sicily. On the floor, dogs were wrangling over a pheasant, while the air was darkened with birds of a thousand hues, which were carrying away from this blessed table, figs, strawberries, and cherries, which now and then they let fall on a family of mice, waiting, with noses in the air, for this manna which was coming to them from heaven. Magdalene held in her hand, and filled with a liquor as golden as a topaz, one of those peculiarly shaped glasses which Petronius has described in the Feast of Trimalchion.

Wholly engaged in this important work, the King had been content to raise his eyes on passing the priory of the Jacobins, the bell of which was ringing a full peal for vespers. All the doors and windows of the said priory were closed so tight that one would have thought it uninhabited had not the sound of the bell been heard from within the building.

Having given this glance, the King actively resumed his cutting. But a hundred feet further on an attentive observer would have given a more curious glance than the first to a house of fine appearance which stood on the left of the road, and which, built in the midst of a charming garden, opened upon the highway behind an iron gate with gilded lances.

This country house was called Bel Esbat.

Exactly contrary to the convent of the Jacobins, Bel Esbat had all its windows open, with the exception of one, in front of which hung a Venetian blind. Just as the King passed, this blind underwent an imperceptible swaying.

The King exchanged a glance and a smile with D'Épernon, then set to work to attack another capital sin.

The latter was the sin of lust.

The artist had depicted it in startling colors, and had stamped the sin with such strength and tenacity that we can cite only one feature of it, although this feature is entirely episodical. The guardian angel of Magdalene, thoroughly startled, was flying to heaven, hiding his eyes with his two hands.

This picture, full of minute details, was so absorbing that the King continued to drive on without noticing a certain specimen of vanity who was assuming an air of affected dignity on the left side of his coach. It was a great pity, for Sainte Maline was very happy, and very proud on his horse.

He so near the King, he the youngest son from Gascony, within hearing of his Majesty, the most Christian King, when he said to his dog:

"Very fine, Master Love, you weary me."

Or to Monsieur le Duc d'Épernon, colonel-general of the infantry of the kingdom:

"Duke, it seems to me that these horses will break my neck."

From time to time, however, as if to give his pride a fall, Sainte Maline looked on the other side of the coach at De Loignac, whom the customary honors rendered indifferent to these very honors; and, seeing that this gentleman was handsomer with his calm manner and modest military bearing than he himself could possibly be, with all his swaggering airs, Sainte Maline strove to calm himself, but soon certain thoughts caused a fierce outburst of his vanity.

"They see me, they look at me," said he, "and they are asking themselves: 'Who is that fortunate gentleman accompanying the King?'"

At the rate they were going, and which scarcely justified the apprehensions of the King, the happiness of Sainte Maline might have lasted a long time, for the horses of Elizabeth, loaded with heavy harness, covered with silver and lace, and imprisoned in traces similar to those of the ark of David, did not advance rapidly in the direction of Vincennes. But as he was growing too proud, something like a warning from above came to temper his joy, something sadder than all else for him. He heard the King pronounce the name of Ernauton.

Two or three times in two or three minutes the King uttered this name. Each time it was necessary for Sainte Maline to lean forward to catch this interesting enigma on the wing.

But like everything really interesting, the enigma was interrupted by some accident or noise. The King uttered some exclamation which was forced from him by his vexation at having given a certain part of his picture a chance cut of the scissors, or by an injunction to keep quiet, addressed with all possible tenderness to Master Love, who yelped with the exaggerated but visible pretension of making as much noise as a mastiff.

The fact is that from Paris to Vincennes the name of Ernauton was pronounced ten times by the King, and at least four times by the duke, without Sainte Maline's being able to understand for what purpose these ten repetitions had taken place.

He imagined (we always like to delude ourselves) that it was merely a question on the part of the King of asking the cause of the young man's disappearance, and on the part of the duke of telling the cause, either assumed or real. When they arrived at Vincennes there still remained three sins to cut out. So, under the specious pretext of devoting himself to this grave occupation, his Majesty, almost as soon as he descended from the coach, shut himself up in his room.

A piercing wind was blowing; Sainte Maline, therefore, had begun to make himself comfortable near a great chimney, where he hoped to get warm and fall asleep, when De Loignac laid a hand on his shoulder.

"You are on fatigue duty to-day," said he, in the short tone which belongs only to a man who, having obeyed a great deal, knew how to make himself obeyed; "you will therefore sleep some other evening; so rise, Monsieur de Sainte Maline."

"I will keep awake for fifteen days, if necessary, monsieur," replied the latter.

"I am sorry I have no one else at hand," said De Loignac, pretending to look around him.

"Monsieur," interrupted Sainte Maline, "it is useless for you to speak to another; if necessary I will not sleep for a month."

"Oh! we shall not be as exacting as that; calm yourself."

"What must I do, monsieur?"

"Remount your horse and return to Paris."

"I am ready; I put my horse still saddled in the stall."

"That is well. You will go direct to the lodgings of the Forty-Five."

"Yes, monsieur."

"There you will waken them all, but in such a way that, except the three chiefs whom I shall designate to you, no one shall know where he is going or what he is going to do."

"I will obey these first orders exactly."

"Here are the others: you will leave fourteen of these gentlemen at the Porte Saint Antoine; fifteen others half way on the road, and you will bring the fourteen remaining ones here."

"Consider that as done, Monsieur de Loignac; but at what hour will it be necessary to leave Paris?"

"At nightfall."

"On horseback or foot?"

"On horseback."

"What arms?"

"Everything: daggers, swords, and pistols."

"Cuirasses?"

"Cuirasses."

"The rest of the order, monsieur?"

"Here are three letters, one for Monsieur de Chalabre, one for Monsieur de Biran, and one for you. Monsieur de Chalabre will command the first squad, Monsieur de Biran the second, and you the third."

"Good, monsieur."

"You will open these letters only when on the spot itself. When six o'clock sounds, Monsieur de Chalabre will open his at the Porte Saint Antoine, Monsieur de Biran at the Faubin Cross, you at the gate of the Donjon."

"Will it be necessary to come quickly?"

"With all the speed of your horses; without arousing any suspicion, however, or being noticed. To leave Paris, each squad will take a different gate: Monsieur de Chalabre, the Porte Bourdelle; Monsieur de Biran, the Porte du Temple; you, who have the longest distance to travel, will take the direct route, that is, the Porte Saint Antoine."

"Very good, monsieur."

"The remaining instructions are in these three letters. Now go."

Sainte Maline bowed, and started to leave.

"By the way," said De Loignac, "from here to the Faubin Cross go as fast as you like; but from the Faubin Cross to the gate walk your horse. You have still two hours before dark; it is more time than you will need."

"Very good, monsieur."

"Have you clearly understood, or do you want me to repeat the order?"

"It is needless, monsieur."

"A pleasant journey to you, Monsieur de Sainte Maline."

And De Loignac, dragging his spurs, reëntered the apartments.

"Fourteen in the first squad, fifteen in the second, and fifteen in the third; evidently they are not counting on Ernauton, and he is no longer one of the Forty-Five."

Saint Maline, puffed up with pride, carried out his commission like an important but prompt man.

Half an hour after his departure from Vincennes, having carried out all De Loignac's instructions to the letter, he passed through the gate. A quarter of an hour later he was in the lodging of the Forty-Five.

The most of these gentlemen were already in their rooms, relishing the odor of supper, which was smoking in the respective kitchens of their housekeepers.

Thus, the noble Lardille de Chavantrade had prepared a dish of mutton and carrots, with a large quantity of spices, that is, in the Gascon mode, — a succulent dish to which, on his part, Militor was giving some attention, namely, some strokes of an iron fork, by the help of which he was testing the degree of dressing for the meats and vegetables.

Thus, Pertinax de Montcrabeau, with the assistance of this singular domestic who did not use "thee" and "thou" to him, but to whom he used them, — Pertinax de Montcrabeau, we say, was exercising his own culinary talents for a squad at common expense. The mess organized by this clever administrator included eight associates, each of whom paid six sous for the meal.

Monsieur de Chalabre never ate ostensibly; he was considered as a mythological being placed by nature beyond every need. That which made one doubt his divine nature was his leanness.

He looked upon breakfast, dinner, and supper of his companions like a proud cat which does not want to beg, but which, nevertheless, is hungry, and which, in order to satisfy its hunger, licks its mustaches. However, it is fair to say that when one offered him anything, and those times were rare, he refused, having, he said, the last morsels in his mouth, and the morsels were never less than pheasants, red partridges,

larks, woodcock pies, and delicate fish. The whole had been skillfully sprinkled with a profusion of wines from Spain and the Archipelago of the best brands, such as Malaga, Cyprus, and Syracuse.

All this company, as we see, disposed as it wished of the silver of his Majesty Henry III.

For the rest, one could judge of the character of each according to the appearance of his little lodging. Some loved flowers, and cultivated in a broken stone jug before the window a lean rose-bush, or some yellowing scabrous plant; others, like the King, had a taste for pictures, without possessing his skill in cutting them out; still others, like veritable canons, had introduced into their lodging the housekeeper or her niece. Monsieur d'Épernon had said in a low tone to De Loignac that he could close his eyes to the Forty-Five not inhabiting the interior of the Louvre, and De Loignac closed his eyes.

Nevertheless, when the trumpet had sounded, all this company became soldiers and slaves of a rigorous discipline, jumped on horseback, and held themselves ready for anything, In winter they went to bed at eight o'clock, in summer at ten; but only fifteen of them slept, fifteen others slept merely with one eye closed, and the rest did not sleep at all.

As it was only half-past five in the afternoon, Sainte Maline found the Forty-Five up, and in the most gastronomic condition in the world.

But at a single word he turned aside all the porringers.

"To horse, gentlemen!" said he.

And leaving the most of the martyrs to the confusion of this manœuvre, he explained the order to Messieurs de Biran and de Chalabre.

Some, in buckling on their belts, and fastening their cuirasses, swallowed large mouthfuls moistened by a great draught of wine; others, whose supper was less advanced, fortified themselves with resignation. Monsieur de Chalabre alone, in tightening the tongue of his sword-belt, pretended to have had supper over an hour ago.

The roll was called.

Only forty-four, including Sainte Maline, responded.

"Monsieur Ernauton de Carmainges is absent," said Monsieur de Chalabre, whose turn it was to exercise the functions of quartermaster.

A deep joy filled the heart of Sainte Maline, and ebbed up as far as his lips, which puckered into a smile, a rare occurrence with this man of gloomy, jealous temperament. In short, in Sainte Maline's eyes Ernauton was infallibly ruined by this groundless absence, at the time of an expedition of such importance. The Forty-Five, or rather the forty-four, therefore, set out, each squad by the route which was indicated to it; that is, Monsieur de Chalabre, with thirteen men, by the Porte Bourdelle; Monsieur de Biran, with fourteen, by the Porte du Temple; and finally, Saint Maline, with fourteen others, by the Porte Saint Antoine.

CHAPTER XLI.

BEL ESBAT.

It is needless to say that Ernauton, whom Sainte Maline thought so completely ruined, was, on the contrary, following the unexpected course of his rising fortune.

At first he had very naturally calculated that the Duchess of Montpensier, whom he was charged to find, would be at the Hôtel de Guise, since she had come to Paris. Therefore Ernauton first set out toward the Hôtel de Guise, where, having rapped at the great door, which was opened to him with extreme caution, when he demanded the honor of an interview with Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier, they cruelly laughed in his face. Then, as he insisted, he was told that he ought to know that her highness lived at Soissons and not in Paris. Ernauton expected this reception, therefore it did not trouble him.

"I am in despair at her absence," said he. "I had a communication of the greatest importance to make to her highness from Monsieur le Duc de Mayenne."

"From Monsieur le Duc de Mayenne?" said the porter; "and who, then, charged you with this communication?"

"Monsieur le Duc de Mayenne himself."

"Charged by him! the duke!" cried the porter, with admirably feigned astonishment; "and where did he charge you with this communication? Monsieur le Duc is no more in Paris than is Madame la Duchesse."

"I know that very well," replied Ernauton; "but I too might not be in Paris. I too may have met Monsieur le Duc elsewhere than in Paris; on the road from Blois, for instance."

"On the road from Blois?" repeated the porter, somewhat more attentive.

"Yes; on this road he may have met me, and charged me with a message for Madame de Montpensier."

Some slight anxiety appeared on the face of the porter, who, as though he feared that an entrance would be forced, still held the door half open.

"Well," said he, "this message?"

"I have it."

"With you?"

"Here," said Ernauton, tapping his doublet.

The faithful servant fixed on Ernauton a questioning glance.

"You say that you have this message with you?" he asked.

"Yes, monsieur."

"And that this message is important?"

"Of the greatest importance."

"Will you just let me see it?"

"Willingly."

And Ernauton drew from his breast the letter from Monsieur de Mayenne.

"Oh! Oh! What singular ink!" said the porter.

"It is blood," replied Ernauton, phlegmatically.

At these words the servant turned pale, and still more, no doubt, at the thought that this blood might be that of Monsieur de Mayenne.

In those times there was a scarcity of ink but a great quantity of blood spilled; the result was that lovers frequently wrote to their mistresses, and relatives to their family, with the liquid most commonly distributed.

"Monsieur," said the servant, in great haste, "I do not know whether you will find Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier in Paris or in the suburbs of Paris; but at all events, be kind enough to proceed without delay to a house in the Faubourg Saint Antoine, called Bel Esbat, and which belongs to Madame la Duchesse. You will recognize it, as it is the first on your left going towards Vincennes, beyond the convent of the Jacobins; you will surely find some one there in the service of Madame la Duchesse, and intimate enough with her to be able

to tell you where Madame la Duchesse may be found at present."

"Very well," said Ernauton, who understood that the servant either could not or would not say anything further. "Thanks."

"In the Faubourg Saint Antoine," repeated the servant, "every one knows and will show you Bel Esbat, — although perhaps it may not be known that it belongs to Madame de Montpensier, Madame de Montpensier having bought this home a short time ago, to have as a retreat."

Ernauton gave a nod of the head, and turned towards the Faubourg Saint Antoine. Without even asking for information he had no trouble in finding this house of Bel Esbat, which adjoined the priory of the Jacobins.

He rang the bell; the door opened.

"Enter," said a voice.

He entered, and the door closed behind him.

Once within he was evidently expected to utter some password; but, as he merely looked about him, he was asked what he wanted.

"I want to speak to Madame la Duchesse," said the young man.

"And why do you come seeking Madame la Duchesse at Bel Esbat?" asked the valet.

"Because," replied Ernauton, "the porter at the Hôtel de Guise sent me here."

"Madame la Duchesse is no more at Bel Esbat than in Paris," replied the valet.

"Then," said Ernauton, "I shall wait until a more propitious moment to fulfil the commission for her with which I was charged by Monsieur le Duc de Mayenne."

"For her! for Madame la Duchesse?"

"For Madame la Duchesse."

"A commission from Monsieur le Duc de Mayenne?"

"Yes."

The valet reflected a moment.

"Monsieur," said he, "I cannot take it upon myself to answer you; but I have a superior here whom I must consult. Kindly wait."

"Here are people who are well served, by Heaven!" said Ernauton. "What order, what discipline, what promptness! surely they are dangerous people who think they must be

"YOU!" CRIED THE LADY IN TURN.

guarded in this way. One cannot enter the houses of Messieur de Guise as one can the Louvre, far from it; so I am beginning to believe that it is not the real king of France whom I serve."

And he looked about him; the court was deserted, but all the doors of the stables were open, as though they expected some troop to enter, and take up its quarters.

Ernauton was interrupted in his examination by the valet, who returned; he was followed by another valet.

"Trust your horse to me, monsieur, and follow my comrade," said he; "you will find some one who can answer you much better than I can."

Ernauton followed the valet, waited an instant in a sort of antechamber, and soon after, upon the order which had been given the servant, was introduced into a small adjoining room, in which a woman dressed without pretension, though with a certain elegance, was working at embroidery.

She sat with her back to Ernauton.

"Here is the gentleman who presents himself on the part of Monsieur de Mayenne, madame," said the lackey.

She turned around.

Ernauton gave a cry of surprise.

"You, madame!" he cried, recognizing at once his page and the unknown lady of the litter under this third transformation.

"You!" cried the lady in turn, letting her work fall and looking at Ernauton.

Then making a sign to the lackey:

"Go," said she.

"You belong to the house of Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier, madame?" asked Ernauton in surprise.

"Yes," said the unknown; "but you, you, monsieur, how do you bring here a message from Monsieur de Mayenne?"

"By a number of circumstances which I could not foresee, and which would be too long to relate to you," said Ernauton, with extreme caution.

"Oh! you are discreet, monsieur," continued the lady, smiling.

"Whenever it is necessary, yes, madame."

"I do not see that this is an occasion for such great discretion," said the unknown; "for indeed, if you really bring a message from the person you say" —

Ernauton made a movement.

"Oh! do not be angry; if you indeed bring a message from the person you say you do, the affair is sufficiently interesting for you in remembrance of our intimacy, passing as it was, to tell us what this message is."

The lady put into these last words all the coquettish, caressing, and seductive charm that a pretty woman can put into a request.

"Madame," replied Ernauton, "you will not make me say that which I do not know."

"And still less that which you will not tell."

"I have nothing whatever to say, madame," said Ernauton, bowing.

"Do as you please in regard to verbal communications, monsieur."

"I have no verbal communication to make, madame; my whole mission consists in delivering a letter to her highness."

"Well, then, this letter?" said the unknown lady, extending her hand.

"This letter?" said Ernauton.

"Kindly give it to us."

"Madame," said Ernauton, "I thought I had had the honor of informing you that this letter was addressed to Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier."

"But the duchess is absent," said the lady, impatiently; "I represent her here; you can therefore"—

"I cannot."

"You mistrust me, monsieur?"

"I ought to, madame," said the young man, with a glance the expression of which could not be mistaken; "but in spite of the mystery of your conduct, you have inspired in me, I will admit, other sentiments than those of which you speak."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the lady, blushing slightly at the intense look of Ernauton.

Ernauton bowed.

"Be careful, Monsieur Messenger," said she, laughing, "you are making a declaration of love to me."

"Why, yes, madame," said Ernauton; "I do not know if I shall ever see you again, and indeed the opportunity is too precious for me to let it escape."

"Ah, I understand."

"You understand that I love you, madame? Indeed, that is an easy thing to understand."

"No, I understand why you came here."

"Ah! pardon, madame," said Ernauton, "it is my turn not to understand."

"Yes, I understand that having the desire to see me again you feigned a pretext to introduce yourself here."

"I, madame, a pretext! Ah! you judge me wrongly; I did not know that I should ever again see you, and I trusted to chance, which already had twice thrown me in your path; but I feign a pretext? — never! I am a strange creature, and I do not think on all subjects as does every one else."

"Oh! oh! you are in love, you say, and you have scruples as to the method of seeing the one you love? That is very fine, monsieur," said the lady, with a certain mock pride; "well, I suspected that you had scruples."

"And about what, madame, if you please?" asked Ernauton.

"The other day you met me; I was in a litter; you recognized me, and yet you did not follow me."

"Take care, madame," said Ernauton, "you are admitting that you noticed me."

"Ah! a fine admission, really! Have we not been seen under circumstances which allowed me, me especially, to put my head out of my litter, when you passed? But no; monsieur galloped away, after having uttered an 'Ah!' which made me tremble within my litter."

"I was forced to continue on my way, madame."

"By your scruples?"

"No, madame, by my duty."

"Well, well," said the lady, laughing, "I see that you are a reasonable, discreet lover, and who above all else are afraid of compromising yourself."

"As you had inspired me with certain fears, madame," replied Ernauton, "is there anything surprising in that? Tell me, is it customary for a woman to wear man's clothes, force the barriers, and come to the Grève to look at the quartering of a wretched victim, and this with many gesticulations more than incomprehensible; tell me?"

The lady grew slightly pale, then, so to speak, hid her pallor under a smile.

Ernauton continued.

"Is it natural, in short, that this lady, as soon as she has had this strange pleasure, should be afraid of being arrested,

and should flee like a robber, she who is in the service of Madame de Montpensier, a powerful princess, although on rather bad terms at court."

This time the lady smiled again, but with more marked irony.

"You have but little perspicuity, monsieur, in spite of your pretension to be observing," said she, "for with a little sense, indeed, everything that seems mysterious to you would at once be made clear. In the first place, was it not very natural that Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier should be interested in the fate of Monsieur de Salcède, in what he might say, in his revelations, false or true, very likely to compromise the entire house of Lorraine? And if that was natural, monsieur, was it less so that this princess should send some reliable, intimate person, in whom she could have entire confidence, to be present at the execution, and ascertain in person, as they say at the palace, the smallest details of the affair? Well, this person, monsieur was I, I, the intimate friend of her highness. Now let us see, do you think that I could go to the Grève in woman's clothes? Do you think, in short, that I could be indifferent, now that you know my position with the duchess, to the sufferings of the victim and to his smallest revelations?"

"You are perfectly right, madame," said Ernauton, bowing, "and now, I swear to you, I admire your spirit and your logic just as much as a moment ago I admired your beauty."

"Many thanks, monsieur. But now that we understand each other, and that matters have been explained between us, give me the letter, since the letter exists and is not a mere pretext."

"Impossible, madame."

The unknown made an effort not to grow angry.

"Impossible?" she repeated.

"Yes, impossible, for I swore to Monsieur le Duc de Mayenne to deliver this letter only to Madame la Duchesse de Montpensier herself."

"Say rather," cried the lady, beginning to give way to her anger, "say rather that this letter does not exist; say that, in spite of your pretended scruples, this letter has been but the pretext of your entrance here; say that you wished to see me again, and that that is all. Well! monsieur, you are satisfied; not only have you entered here, not only have you seen me again, but you have also told me that you adore me."

"And in that, as in everything else, madame, I have told you the truth."

"Well! so be it, you adore me; you wished to see me again; you have seen me; I have procured you a pleasure in exchange for a service. We are quits, adieu!"

"I will obey you, madame, and since you dismiss me I will retire."

This time the lady became angry in earnest.

"Yes!" said she; "but if you know me, I do not know you. Does it not seem to you that on this point you have too much of an advantage over me? Ah! you think that, under some pretext or other, it is sufficient to enter the house of any princess, for you are in the house of Madame de Montpensier, monsieur, and to say: 'I have succeeded in my perfidy, I will retire.' Monsieur, such an act is not that of a gallant man."

"It seems to me, madame," said Ernauton, "that you give a very hard name to that which at most would have been a trick of love, if, as I have had the honor of telling you, it were not an affair of the greatest importance and of unvarnished truth. I refuse to notice your cruel words, madame, and I shall absolutely forget everything affectionate and tender I may have said to you, since you are so ill-disposed toward me. But I will not leave here under the weight of the unpleasant imputations to which you have subjected me. I have, as a matter of fact, a letter from Monsieur de Mayenne to deliver to Madame de Montpensier, and this is the letter. It is written in his hand, as you may see from the address."

Ernauton held out the letter to the lady, but without giving it up.

The unknown glanced at it and exclaimed:

"His writing! Blood!"

Without replying, Ernauton replaced the letter in his pocket, bowed a last time with his usual courtesy, and pale and sick at heart, turned towards the door of the apartment. This time she ran after him, and, like Joseph, he was seized by his cloak.

"Your pleasure, madame?" said he.

"For pity's sake, monsieur, forgive!" cried the lady, "forgive; has some accident happened to the duke?"

"Whether I forgive you or not, madame," said Ernauton, "it is all the same; as to this letter, since you ask forgiveness of me in order to read it, and since Madame de Montpensier alone shall read it" —

"Ah! wretched madman that you are!" cried the duchess,

with a fury full of majesty, "do you not recognize me, or rather do you not guess me to be the mistress? and do you think these eyes shine like those of a servant? I am the Duchess of Montpensier; give me this letter."

"You the duchess?" cried Ernauton, recoiling in amazement.

"Yes! to be sure. Come, now, give it to me; do you not see that I am in haste to know what has happened to my brother?"

But instead of obeying, as the princess expected him to do, the young man, having recovered from his first surprise, crossed his arms.

"How can you expect me to believe your words," said he, "you whose lips have already twice lied to me?"

The eyes which the princess had called to the aid of her words shot two mortal flashes, but Ernauton bore their fire bravely.

"You still mistrust! You need proofs when I make a statement!" cried the imperious woman, tearing her lace ruffles with her beautiful hands.

"Yes, madame," replied Ernauton, coldly.

The unknown ran to a bell, which she came near breaking, so violent was the pull with which she rang it.

The vibration resounded sharply throughout all the apartments, and before it had died away a valet appeared.

"What does madame wish?" he asked.

The unknown stamped her foot with rage.

"Mayneville," said she, "I want Mayneville. Is he not here?"

"Yes, madame."

"Well! have him come, then!"

The valet fled from the room. A minute later Mayneville entered hurriedly.

"At your command, madame," said he.

"'Madame'! and since when have they called me simply 'madame,' Monsieur de Mayneville?" said the duchess, exasperated.

"At your highness's command," said Mayneville, bowing, and surprised to the point of stupefaction.

"It is well!" said Ernauton, "for I have opposite me a gentleman, and if he tells me a falsehood, by Heaven, I shall at least know on whom to lay the blame!"

"You believe at last, then?" said the duchess.

"Yes, madame, I believe; and as proof, here is the letter."

And the young man bowed, and handed to Madame de Montpensier the letter so long disputed.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE LETTER FROM MONSIEUR DE MAYENNE.

The duchess took the letter, opened it, and read it eagerly without even trying to hide the impressions which succeeded one another on her face, like clouds across the sky during a hurricane.

When she had finished she handed to Mayneville, who was as anxious as herself, the letter brought by Ernauton. It read as follows:

"My Sister: I tried myself to do the business of a captain or master of arms. I have been punished. I have received a good sword-thrust from the fellow whom you know, and with whom for so long I have had an account. The worst of it all is that he killed five of my men, among them Boularon and Desnoises, that is, two of the best; after which he fled. I must say that he was greatly aided in his victory by the bearer of this letter, a charming young man, as you will see. I recommend him to you, he is discretion itself.

"One merit which he will have for you, I presume, my very dear sister, is that he prevented my conqueror from cutting off my head, which the conqueror had a great desire to do, having torn off my mask while I had fainted, and having recognized me. I recommend you, my sister, to find out the name and calling of this very discreet cavalier; he is suspicious, while of interest to me. To all my offers of service he merely replied that the master he serves lets him want for nothing.

"I can tell you no more about him, for this is all I know; he pretends that he does not know me. Note this.

"I am suffering a very great deal, but am in no danger, I think. Send my surgeon to me quickly; I am, like a horse, on straw. The bearer will tell you the place.

"Your affectionate brother,

"Mayenne."

The letter read, the duchess and Mayneville, equally astonished, looked at each other.

The duchess was the first to break the silence which would have been interpreted by Ernauton.

"To whom," asked the duchess, "are we indebted for the signal service which you have rendered us, monsieur?"

"To a man who, whenever he can, madame, comes to the assistance of the weak against the strong."

"Will you give me some details, monsieur," insisted Madame de Montpensier.

Ernauton related all that he knew, and indicated the retreat of the duke. Madame de Montpensier and Mayneville listened to him with an interest easy to comprehend.

Then when he had finished:

"May I hope, monsieur," asked the duchess, "that you will continue the work so well begun, and that you will attach yourself to our house?"

These words, uttered in the gracious tone which the duchess knew so well how to assume at times, contained a very flattering meaning after the avowal which Ernauton had made to the duchess's maid of honor; but the young man, setting aside all pride, reduced these words to simple curiosity. He saw clearly that to state his name and his position would open the eyes of the duchess to the results of this event; he easily guessed, too, that the King in making his one condition as to an explanation of the residence of the duchess had something else in view besides mere information.

Two interests, therefore, struggled within him; as a man in love, he could sacrifice the one; as a man of honor, he could not abandon the other.

The temptation was all the stronger as by avowing his position in regard to the King he would gain an immense importance in the eyes of the duchess; and because it was no small consideration for a young man coming straight from Gascony to be important in the eyes of a duchess of Montpensier.

Sainte Maline would not have hesitated an instant.

All these thoughts rushed through the mind of Carmainges, and had no other influence than to make him somewhat more proud, that is, somewhat stronger.

At that moment it would have been a very great deal to be something; much for him at a time when he had certainly been taken almost for a plaything.

The duchess therefore waited for his reply to the question she had asked of him: "Are you disposed to attach yourself to our house?"

"Madame," said Ernauton, "I have already had the honor of saying to Monsieur de Mayenne that my master is a good master, and by the way in which he treats me he relieves me from seeking a better one."

"My brother tells me in his letter, monsieur, that you did not seem to recognize him. How, not having recognized him there, did you use his name here, to enter my house?"

"Monsieur de Mayenne seemed to wish to preserve his incognito, madame, therefore I did not think I ought to recognize him, and indeed it might have been inconvenient for the peasants with whom he is lodged to know on what an illustrious guest they were bestowing their hospitality. Here, this inconvenience no longer exists; on the contrary, the name of Monsieur de Mayenne opened a way to you. Therefore I resorted to it. In this case, as in the other, I think I have acted like a gallant man."

Mayneville looked at the duchess as though to say to her:

"He is cunning, madame."

The duchess understood thoroughly.

She looked at Ernauton, smiling.

"No one could extricate himself better from an embarrassing question," said she, "and you are, I must acknowledge, a man of great cleverness."

"I see nothing clever in that which I have had the honor of telling you, madame," replied Ernauton.

"In short, monsieur," said the duchess, with some impatience, "I see clearly by all this that you will tell nothing. Perhaps you do not sufficiently reflect that gratitude is a heavy burden for one who bears my name; that I am a woman, that you have twice rendered me a service, and that if I really wished to know your name, or rather who you are" —

"I well know, madame, that you can easily learn all that; but you will learn it from some one else besides myself, and I shall have said nothing."

"He is always right," said the duchess, fixing on Ernauton a glance which, had he understood its entire meaning, would have given more pleasure to the young man than any glance had yet done.

Therefore he asked no more, but, like the gourmand who

rises from the table when he thinks he has drunk the best wine of the repast, Ernauton bowed and asked leave of the duchess to retire.

"So, monsieur, that is all you have to say to me?" asked the duchess.

"I have executed my commission," replied the young man; "nothing remains for me but to present my very humble respects to your highness."

The duchess followed him with her eyes, without returning his bow; then, when the door had closed behind him:

"Mayneville," said she, stamping her foot, "have this young man followed."

"Impossible, madame," replied Mayneville; "all our men are away; I myself am awaiting the event. It is a poor day to do anything except that which we have decided to do."

"You are right, Mayneville; truly, I am mad; but later" —

"Oh! later; that is a different thing; as you will, madame."

"Yes, for I suspect him, as does my brother."

"Suspicious or not," replied Mayneville, "he is a brave fellow, and brave men are rare. We must admit that we are fortunate — a stranger, an unknown man, falling from Heaven to render us such a service."

"Never mind, never mind, Mayneville; if we are obliged to abandon him at this moment, watch him later, at least."

"Ah! madame, later," said Mayneville, "we shall have no need, I hope, to watch any one."

"Well, decidedly, I do not know what I am saying this evening; you are right, Mayneville, I am losing my wits."

"It is permitted to a general like yourself, madame, to be preoccupied on the eve of a decisive action."

"That is true. It is dark, Mayneville, and the Valois returns from Vincennes at dark."

"Oh! we have time before us; it is not eight o'clock, madame, and besides, our men have not yet arrived."

"All have the word, have they not?"

"All."

"They are reliable men?"

"Tried, madame."

"How do they come?"

"Alone and walking."

"How many do you expect?"

"Fifty; it is more than necessary. Understand, moreover,

that besides these fifty men we have two hundred monks who are worth as many soldiers, if, indeed, they are not worth more."

"As soon as our men have arrived, have your monks line up on the road."

"They are already instructed, madame; they will intercept the way, our men will push the carriage towards them, the gate of the convent will be open, and will have merely to close in on the coach."

"Well, let us have supper, then, Mayneville; that will make the time pass for us. I am so impatient that I should like to push forward the hands of the clock."

"The hour will come; rest assured."

"But our men, our men?"

"They will be here on time; eight o'clock has scarcely struck, there is no time lost."

"Mayneville, Mayneville, my poor brother demands his surgeon; the best surgeon, the best cure for De Mayenne's wound would be a lock of hair from the shaved Valois, and the man who should carry him that gift, Mayneville, this man would be sure of being welcome."

"In two hours, madame, this man will set out to find our dear duke in his retreat; having left Paris a fugitive, he will return to it a conqueror."

"Another word, Mayneville," said the duchess, pausing on the threshold of the door.

"What, madame?"

"Are our friends in Paris warned?"

"What friends?"

"Our Leaguers."

"God forbid, madame! To warn a bourgeois is to sound the bell of Notre Dame. The deed done, remember that before anything is known about it, we have fifty couriers to despatch; then the prisoner will be safe in the cloister, and we can defend ourselves against an army. If necessary, we will risk nothing further, and can cry from the roofs of the convent: 'The Valois is ours!'"

"Well, well, you are a clever and prudent man, Mayneville, and the Béarnais is right in calling you 'Mèneligue.' I intended doing something of what you have just said; but my ideas were confused. Do you know that my responsibility is great, Mayneville, and that never at any time will a woman

have undertaken and accomplished such a work as the one which I plan ?"

"I well know it, madame, therefore I counsel you, trembling."

"So I sum up," resumed the duchess, with authority; "the monks are armed under their robes ?"

"They are."

"The swordsmen on the road ?"

"They should be there now."

"The bourgeois informed after the event ?"

"That is the business of three couriers; in ten minutes, Lachapelle Marteau, Brigard, and Bussy Leclerc will be told; these in turn will inform the others."

"In the first place, have those two great fellows killed whom we saw riding on either side of the coach; and done in such a way that afterwards we may describe the event as it will be most advantageous to our interests to describe it."

"Kill those poor devils!" said Mayneville; "you think it is necessary to kill them, madame ?"

"De Loignac? he would be no great loss!"

"He is a brave soldier."

"A worthless fellow, like that other ill-looking man who pranced on the left of the coach, with his burning eyes and dark skin."

"Ah! that one I feel less reluctant about. I do not know him; besides, I am of your opinion, madame, he has a bad look about him."

"You give him up to me, then ?" said the duchess, laughing.

"Oh! with all my heart, madame."

"Many thanks, truly."

"My God, madame, I will not argue over it; what I say is always for your own reputation and for the morality of the party we represent."

"That is well, that is well, Mayneville, we know that you are a virtuous man, and we will sign you a certificate for it, if necessary. You will count for nothing in all this affair, they will have defended the Valois, and will have been killed defending him. What I recommend to you is this young man."

"What young man ?"

"The one who left here; see if he is indeed gone, and if he is not some spy, sent us by our enemies."

"Madame," said Mayneville, "I am at your command."

He stepped to the balcony, half opened the blinds, put his head out, and tried to see outside.

"Oh! A dark night!" said he.

"A good, an excellent night," said the duchess; "the darker the better; so courage, my captain."

"Yes, but we shall see nothing, madame, and yet for you it is important to see."

"God, whose interests we are defending, sees for us, Mayneville."

Mayneville, who, at least so we may believe, was not as confident as Madame de Montpensier as to the intervention of God in affairs of this kind, — Mayneville returned to the window, and gazing into the darkness as far as it was possible to do so, remained motionless.

"Do you see any one passing?" asked the duchess, extinguishing the lights, out of precaution.

"No, but I hear the tramp of horses."

"Well, well, it is they, Mayneville. All goes well."

And the duchess looked to see if she had still at her belt the famous pair of gold scissors which was to play so important a part in history.

CHAPTER XLIII.

HOW DOM MODESTE GORENFLOT BLESSED THE KING AS HIS MAJESTY PASSED BEFORE THE PRIORY OF THE JACOBINS.

Ernauton left with a full heart but a perfectly clear conscience. He had had the singular good fortune to declare his love to a princess, and, by the important conversation which had immediately succeeded it, had made his declaration forgotten, just enough for it to do no harm for the present, and for it to bear fruit in the future.

This was not all; he had again had the chance not to betray the King, not to betray Monsieur de Mayenne, and not to betray himself.

He was content, therefore, but he still desired many things, and among these things a speedy return to Vincennes in order to inform the King, then, the King informed, to go to sleep and dream.

Dreaming is the supreme happiness of men of action; it is the only rest they allow themselves.

So, scarcely was he outside of the gate of Bel Esbat when Ernauton put his horse to the gallop; but he had hardly galloped a hundred feet on that companion, so well tried for several days, when he saw himself suddenly stopped by an obstacle which his eyes, dazzled by the light of Bel Esbat and still unaccustomed to the darkness, had not perceived and could not measure.

It was simply a company of horsemen, who closed in upon the middle of the road from both sides, surrounded him, and aimed at his breast half a dozen swords and as many pistols and daggers.

It was too much for a single man.

"Oh! oh!" said Ernauton, "stealing on the road a league from Paris; deuce take the country! The King has a bad provost; I must advise him to change him."

"Silence, if you please," said a voice which Ernauton thought he recognized; "your sword, your arms, and be quick."

A man took hold of the horse's bridle; two others despoiled Ernauton of his arms.

"The deuce! what clever men!" murmured Ernauton.

Then turning to those who stopped him:

"Gentlemen," said he, "at least you will do me the favor to tell me"—

"Oh! it is Monsieur de Carmainges!" said the chief highwayman, the very one who had just seized the young man's sword and who still held it.

"Monsieur de Pincornay!" cried Ernauton. "Oh! Fie! What a mean business you are carrying on here."

"I said silence!" repeated the resounding voice a few feet away, "let this man be led to the station."

"But, Monsieur de Sainte Maline," said Perducas de Pincornay, "this man whom we have just arrested"—

"Well?"

"Is our companion, Monsieur Ernauton de Carmainges."

"Ernauton here!" cried Sainte Maline, turning white with anger; "what is he doing here?"

"Good evening, gentlemen," said Carmainges, calmly; "I did not think, I confess, to find myself in such good company."

Sainte Maline remained silent.

"It seems that I am arrested," continued Ernauton; "for I do not suppose that you were going to rob me."

"The devil! the devil!" growled Sainte Maline, "the event was not foreseen."

"None the more on my side, I swear to you," said Carmainges, laughing.

"It is embarrassing; come, what were you doing on the road?"

"If I put this question to you, Monsieur de Sainte Maline, would you answer me?"

"No."

"Then you will approve of my acting as you would act."

"So you are not willing to tell what you were doing on the road?"

Ernauton smiled, but did not reply.

"Nor where you were going?"

The same silence.

"Then, monsieur," said Sainte Maline, "since you will not explain yourself, I am forced to treat you as I would any man."

"Do so, monsieur; but I warn you that you will answer for what you do."

"To Monsieur de Loignac?"

"Higher than that."

"To Monsieur d'Épernon?"

"Higher still."

"Well, so be it! I have my orders, and I shall send you to Vincennes."

"To Vincennes? Good! that is where I was going, monsieur."

"I am glad, monsieur," said Sainte Maline, "that this little journey tallies so well with your intentions."

Two men, pistols in hand, at once took possession of the prisoner, whom they led to two other men stationed five feet from the first. These two did the same, and in this manner Ernauton had the society of his comrades as far as the courtyard itself of the Donjon.

Within this courtyard Carmainges perceived fifty disarmed horsemen, who, with long faces and pale brows, and surrounded by a hundred and fifty light horses, arrived from Nogart and Brie, were deploring their ill luck and waiting for some villanous explanation of an enterprise so well begun.

There were our Forty-Five, who, as a sort of prelude to their duty, had captured all these men, some by craft, others by main force; now by uniting ten against two or three, now by graciously accosting the horsemen whom they thought would be formidable, and by pointing their pistols directly at them, when the others thought that they were merely meeting comrades and receiving courtesies.

The result was that no combat had occurred, no cry had been uttered, and that in an encounter of eight against twenty, a chief of the Leaguers, who had laid his hand on his dagger to defend himself, and opened his mouth to shout, had been gagged, almost smothered, and hurried away by the Forty-Five, with the agility with which the crew of a ship shoots a cable between the fingers of a chain of men. Now, such an affair would have greatly rejoiced Ernauton if he had understood it; but the young man saw without comprehending, which made matters somewhat cloudy for ten minutes.

However, when he had recognized all the prisoners whom he had joined:

"Monsieur," said he to Sainte Maline, "I see that you were informed of the importance of my mission, and that like a gallant comrade you feared some unfortunate meeting for me and determined to take the trouble of having me escorted; now, I can say to you that you were wholly in the right; the King is waiting for me, and I have important matters to tell him. I will even add that as, without you, I probably should not have reached here, I shall have the honor of telling the King what you have done for the good of his service."

Sainte Maline turned red, as he had turned pale; but he understood, like the clever man he was when not blinded by some passion, that Ernauton spoke the truth, and that he was expected. They did not joke with Messieurs de Loignac and D'Épernon; therefore he contented himself with replying:

"You are free, Monsieur Ernauton; delighted to have been able to be of use to you."

Ernauton hurried from the ranks, and ascended the steps which led to the apartments of the King.

Sainte Maline followed him with his eyes, and half way up the stairway he saw De Loignac receive Monsieur de Carmainges and sign to him to come on.

De Loignac then came down; he proceeded to the despoiling of the captives.

He found, and it was De Loignac who stated this fact, that the road, now free, thanks to the arrest of the fifty men, would be safe until the following day, since the hour at which these fifty men were to gather at Bel Esbat had passed.

There was, therefore, no more danger in the King's returning to Paris.

De Loignac counted without the convent of the Jacobins and without the artillery and musketry of the good monks, of which D'Épernon had been thoroughly informed by Nicholas Poulain.

So, when De Loignac went to his chief and said:

"Monsieur, the roads are free," D'Épernon answered him:

"Very well. The order of the King is that the Forty-Five form three squads, one in front and one on either side of the coach; a sufficient defence so that the firing, if there chance to be any, may not reach the carriage."

"Very well," replied De Loignac, with the impassibility of the soldier; "but as to any firing, as I see no muskets I do not expect any shots."

"At the Jacobins, monsieur, you will close the ranks," said D'Épernon.

This dialogue was interrupted by a movement which was taking place on the stairs. It was the King descending, ready to start; he was followed by a few gentlemen, among whom, with a tightening of the heart easy to understand, Sainte Maline recognized Ernauton.

"Gentlemen," asked the King, "are my brave Forty-Five assembled?"

"Yes, sire," said D'Épernon, showing him a group of horsemen drawn up under the arches.

"The orders have been given?"

"And will be carried out, sire."

"Then let us start," said his Majesty.

De Loignac had the signal sounded to saddle.

The roll-call made in a low tone, he found that the Forty-Five were there; not one was missing. To the light horse was entrusted the duty of taking prisoners Mayneville's men, and those of the duchess, with the warning, under penalty of death, not to address a single word to them. The King stepped into his coach, and placed his naked sword by his side.

Monsieur D'Épernon swore "*Parfandious*," and gallantly tried if his sword moved easily in its sheath.

Nine o'clock struck from the Donjon; they started.

One hour after the departure of Ernauton, Monsieur de Mayneville was still at the window, whence we saw him endeavor but in vain to follow the course of the young man in the darkness; but, the hour having glided away, he was much less calm, and somewhat more inclined to trust in the help of God, for he was beginning to think that the help of men was failing him.

Not one of his soldiers had appeared; the road, silent and black, resounded only at long intervals with the noise of horses going at full speed to Vincennes. At this sound, Monsieur de Mayneville and the duchess strove to penetrate the shadows with their glances in order to find their men, to guess something of what was taking place, or to discover the cause of the delay.

But these sounds having died away, everything was again silent.

This constant coming and going, without any result, had finally filled Mayneville with such anxiety that he had had one of the servants of the duchess mount his horse, with orders to gain information from the first company of horsemen he met.

The messenger had not returned. Seeing this, the impatient duchess had sent a second, who had returned no more than the first.

"Our officer," then said the duchess, still disposed to look at things in a hopeful light, "our officer has been afraid of not having men enough, and he is keeping the servants we send him as reënforcements; that is wise but alarming."

"Alarming, yes, very alarming," replied Mayneville, whose eyes had not left the dark and gloomy horizon.

"Mayneville, what can have happened?"

"I will mount a horse myself, and we shall know, madame."

And Mayneville made as though to leave.

"I forbid you to do so!" cried the duchess, detaining him. "Mayneville, who would remain with me? Who would know all our officers, all our friends, when the decisive moment comes? No, no, stay, Mayneville; one naturally imagines all sorts of things when a matter of this importance is at stake; but really the plan was too well arranged, and was kept too much of a secret, not to succeed."

"Nine o'clock," said Mayneville, replying to his own impatience rather than to the words of the duchess, "well! there

are the Jacobins coming out of their convent, and ranging themselves along the wall of the court; perhaps they have some private notice."

"Silence!" cried the duchess, raising her hand towards the horizon.

"What?"

"Silence; listen!"

A rumbling like that of thunder was beginning to be heard.

"It is the cavalry!" cried the duchess; "they are bringing him to us!"

And, according to her impetuous temperament, passing from the most cruel apprehension to the wildest joy, she clapped her hands, crying:

"I have him! I have him!"

Mayneville was still listening.

"Yes," said he, "yes; it is a coach coming, and galloping horses."

And he commanded in a loud voice:

"Outside the walls, monks, outside the walls!"

At once the great iron gate of the priory was hastily flung open, and the hundred armed monks, at the head of which walked Borromée, marched out.

They took their position across the road.

Then the voice of Gorenflot was heard shouting:

"Wait for me! wait for me! It is important that I be at the head of the chapter to receive his Majesty properly."

"On the balcony, lord prior! on the balcony!" cried Borromée, "you know very well that you must command all of us. The Scripture says, 'Thou shalt dominate as the cedar dominates the hyssop.'"

"That is true," said Gorenflot, "that is true. I had forgotten that I had chosen that post; fortunately you are here to remind me, Brother Borromée, fortunately."

Borromée gave a command in a low tone, and four monks, under the pretext of honor and ceremony, flanked the worthy prior to his balcony. Soon the road, which made a turn a short distance from the priory, was lighted by a number of torches, thanks to which the duchess and Mayneville could see cuirasses shine and swords glitter.

Incapable of restraining herself, the duchess cried:

"Go down, Mayneville, and bring him to me, bound and escorted by guards."

"Yes, yes, madame," said the gentleman, absentmindedly; "but one thing troubles me."

"What?"

"I do not hear the signal agreed on."

"Of what use is the signal, since they have him?"

"But they were to arrest him here, opposite the priory, it seems to me," insisted Mayneville.

"They found a better opportunity further away."

"I do not see our officer."

"I do."

"Where?"

"That red plume!"

"By Heavens, madame!"

"What?"

"That red plume!"

"Well?"

"That is Monsieur d'Épernon! Monsieur d'Épernon, sword in hand."

"They have left him his sword?"

"By Heavens! he commands."

"Our men? There is treason, then?"

"Well, madame, these are not our men."

"You are mad, Mayneville."

At that moment De Loignac, at the head of the first company of the Forty-Five, brandished a large sword and cried:

"Long live the King!"

"Long live the King!" enthusiastically replied the Forty-Five, with their formidable Gascon accent.

The duchess turned pale, and fell forward on the ledge of the window, as though she had fainted.

Mayneville, gloomy and resolute, grasped his sword. He did not know whether the men would invade the house as they passed or not.

The procession still advanced like a torrent of noise and light. It had reached Bel Esbat, it was approaching the priory.

Borromée took three steps forward. De Loignac pushed his horse straight towards this monk, who, in his woollen robe, seemed to offer battle.

But Borromée like an intelligent man saw that all was lost, and instantly made up his mind.

"Room! room!" cried De Loignac, roughly; "room for the King!"

Borromée, who had drawn his sword under his robe, put it back into its sheath, under his robe.

Gorenflot, stunned by the shouts and the noise of arms, and dazzled by the flare of the torches, extended his powerful right hand, and, the first and middle finger raised, blessed the King from the height of his balcony. Henry, leaning from the window of his coach, saw him, and bowed, smiling.

This smile, authentic proof of the favor which the worthy prior of the Jacobins enjoyed at court, electrified Gorenflot, who shouted in his turn a "Long live the King!" in tones capable of raising the arches of a cathedral.

But the rest of the convent remained silent. In fact, it had expected a very different end to the two months of drilling and the purchase of arms.

But Borromée, veritable trooper that he was, had with a glance estimated the number of the King's defenders, and recognized their warlike bearing. The absence of the partisans of the duchess showed him the fatal issue of the undertaking; to hesitate to submit, was to lose everything. He did not hesitate, but just as the breast of De Loignac's horse was about to knock him down, he cried, "Long live the King!" in a voice almost as sonorous as that to which Gorenflot had just given utterance.

Then the entire convent shouted, "Long live the King!" and brandished their arms.

"Thanks, reverend fathers, thanks!" cried the rasping voice of Henry III.

Then he passed in front of the convent which was to have been the limit of his drive like a whirlwind of fire, noise, and glory, leaving Bel Esbat behind him in the darkness.

From the height of her balcony, hidden by the shield of gilded iron, behind which she had fallen on her knees, the duchess saw, questioned, devoured each face, on which the torches threw their glaring light.

"Ah!" said she, with a cry, pointing out one of the cavaliers of the escort. "See, see, Mayneville!"

"The young man, the messenger of Monsieur le Duc de Mayenne, in the service of the King!" exclaimed the latter.

"We are lost!" murmured the duchess.

"We must flee, and at once, madame," said Mayneville; "conqueror to-day, to-morrow the Valois will abuse his victory."

"We have been betrayed!" cried the duchess; "that young man has betrayed us! He knew all!"

The King was already far away. He had disappeared with his entire escort under the Porte Saint Antoine, which opened before him and closed behind him.

CHAPTER XLIV.

HOW CHICOT BLESSED KING LOUIS THE ELEVENTH FOR HAVING INVENTED THE POST, AND HOW HE RESOLVED TO PROFIT BY THE INVENTION.

Chicot, to whom our readers will allow us to return, after the important discovery which he had just made in untying the cords from the mask of Monsieur de Mayenne, had not an instant to lose in getting away as quickly as possible out of sound of the adventure.

Between the duke and himself it would henceforth be a deadly combat, as we can well understand. Wounded in his flesh, Mayenne, who to the old blows of the scabbard now joined the recent blow of the sword, would never forgive.

"Well! well!" cried the brave Gascon, hastening along the road in the direction of Beaugency, "now or never is the time to use on post horses the money collected from those three illustrious personages who are called Henry of Valois, Dom Modeste Gorenflot, and Sebastian Chicot."

Clever as he was in mimicking not only every sentiment but every condition as well, Chicot at once assumed the air of a great lord, as, under less precarious conditions, he had assumed that of a pleasant bourgeois. And never was prince served with greater zeal than Maître Chicot, when he had sold Ernauton's horse, and spoken for a quarter of an hour with the postmaster.

Once in the saddle, Chicot determined not to stop until he thought himself in a place of safety; therefore he galloped as fast as the horses of thirty relays would allow him. As for himself, he seemed made of steel, and at the end of sixty leagues, finished in twenty-four hours, did not appear to feel the slightest fatigue.

When, thanks to this haste, he had reached Bordeaux in

three days, Chicot thought that he might indeed be allowed to take a little breath.

One can think when one gallops; in fact, one can scarcely do anything but that.

Therefore Chicot thought a great deal.

His embassy, which grew more important the nearer he came to the end of his journey, appeared to him in a very different light, without our being able to say precisely in what light it did appear to him.

What prince was he going to find in this strange Henry, whom some thought a fool, others a coward, and every one an unimportant renegade?

But Chicot's opinion was not that of every one.

Since his stay in Navarre, Henry's character, like the skin of a chameleon, which assumes the color of the object upon which it happens to be, — Henry's character, on touching his native soil, had undergone some changes. Henry had known how to put sufficient space between the royal claw and this precious skin which he had saved so skilfully from all rent so as not to fear any further attacks.

However, his outward policy was always the same; he extinguished himself in the general uproar, extinguishing with him and around him some illustrious names, which, in the French world, one wondered to see reflecting their brightness on a pale crown of Navarre. As at Paris, he paid assiduous court to his wife, whose influence, at two hundred leagues from Paris, seemed, however, to have become null. In short, he vegetated, happy to live.

For the vulgar, he was a subject for hyperbolical jesting.

For Chicot, he was a subject for deep thought.

Chicot, little as he seemed to do so, naturally devined the hearts of others beneath their covering.

Henry of Navarre, therefore, was an enigma, though not a solved enigma.

To know that Henry of Navarre was an enigma and not a fact, pure and simple, was to know much already. Therefore Chicot knew more about him than any one, realizing, like the old sage of Greece, that he knew nothing. There where every one went about with open brow, free speech, his heart on his lips, Chicot felt that he must go with oppressed heart, prepared speeches, his brow wrinkled like that of an actor.

This need of dissimulation was suggested to him, first, by

his natural instinct, then by the aspect of the places through which he journeyed.

Once within the limits of this little principality of Navarre, a country the poverty of which was proverbial in France, Chicot, to his great surprise, ceased to see impressed on every face, on every house, on every stone, the mark of that hideous misery which was consuming the most beautiful provinces of the superb France he had just left.

The woodcutter who passed, his arm leaning on the yoke of his favorite ox; the girl with the short skirt and the quick gait, who carried water on her head in the manner of the chœphores of old; the old man singing a song of his youth, shaking his hoary head the while; the tame bird chattering in its cage and pecking at its full crib; the brown child, with thin but active limbs, playing on the carpet of wheat sheaves, — all spoke to Chicot a living language, clear, intelligent; all cried to him at every step:

"See, we are happy here!"

Sometimes, at the sound of wheels rumbling along the hollow roads, Chicot felt a sudden terror. He recalled the heavy artillery which cut up the roads of France. But at a turn of the road the wagon of a vintager came in sight, laden with casks and red-faced children. When from afar the barrel of a rifle made him open his eyes, behind a hedge of figs or vine-branches, Chicot thought of the three ambuscades from which he had so happily escaped. It was, however, only a hunter followed by his great dogs, crossing the plain full of hares to reach the mountain rich in red partridge and grouse.

Although the season was advanced and Chicot had left Paris full of fogs and hoar frost, it was warm, beautiful weather. The great trees had not yet lost their leaves, which in the south they never wholly shed, and from the height of their reddening domes threw a blue shadow over the chalky ground. The horizon, clear, pure, and free from clouds, was mirrored in the rays of the sun, variegated with villages of white houses.

The Béarnais peasant with cap tipped over one ear urged across the meadows the small horses (sold for three crowns), which, bounding untiringly on their legs of steel, make twenty leagues at a stretch, and never combed, never covered, shake themselves when they arrive at their goal, where they browse among the first clump of heather they reach, their one, but sufficient repast.

"*Ventre de biche!*" said Chicot, "I have never seen Gascony so rich. The Béarnais lives in clover. Since he is happy, there is every reason for supposing, as his brother the King of France says, that he is — good; but perhaps he does not admit it. In truth, although translated into Latin, the letter still troubles me; I almost want to translate it into Greek. But, bah! I have never heard that Henriot, as his brother Charles IX. called him, knew Latin. I will make a French translation of my Latin translation, *expurgata*, as they say at the Sorbonne."

And Chicot, in making these reflections to himself, asked aloud where the king was.

The king was at Nérac. At first they had thought him at Pau, which had induced our messenger to push on toward Mont-de-Marsan; but arrived in the latter place, the topography of the court had been rectified, and Chicot had set out to the left to take the road to Nérac, which he found full of people returning from the market at Condom.

They told him (Chicot, we must remember, very circumspect when it was necessary to reply to the questions of others, was a great questioner) — they told him, we say, that the King of Navarre led a very happy life, and that he did not rest in his perpetual transitions from one love to another.

Chicot, on the way, had made the pleasant acquaintance of a young Catholic priest, a sheep-dealer, and an officer, who were good company from Mont-de-Marsan, and who chatted, with much feasting, whenever they stopped.

These men seemed to him, by this wholly chance association, to represent Navarre, enlightened, commercial, military. The priest recited to him the sonnets which were made on the loves of the king and the beautiful Fosseuse, daughter of René de Montmorency, Baron of Fosseux.

"Well, well," said Chicot, "we must understand each other. They believe in Paris that his majesty the King of Navarre is in love with Mademoiselle Le Rebours."

"Oh!" said the officer, "that was at Pau."

"Yes, yes," echoed the priest, "that was at Pau."

"Ah! that was at Pau?" asked the merchant, who, as simple bourgeois, seemed the least well informed of the three.

"What!" said Chicot, "then the king has a mistress in every city?"

"That may be so," said the officer, "for, to my knowledge, he

was the lover of Mademoiselle Dayelle, while I was in garrison at Castelnaudary."

"Wait, wait," said Chicot; "Mademoiselle Dayelle, a Greek?"

"Yes," said the priest, "a Cypriote."

"Pardon, pardon," said the merchant, delighted to put in his word, "I am from Agen!"

"Well?"

"Well! I can answer for it that the king knew Mademoiselle de Tignonville at Agen."

"*Ventre de biche!*" exclaimed Chicot. "What a gay deceiver! But to return to Mademoiselle Dayelle, I knew the family"—

"Mademoiselle Dayelle was always jealous and threatening; she had a pretty little curved dagger which she kept on her work-table, and one day the king left, and took the dagger with him, saying that he did not want any mishap to come to the one who might succeed him."

"So that up to the present time his majesty belongs wholly to Mademoiselle le Rebours?" asked Chicot.

"On the contrary, on the contrary," said the priest, "they have fallen out. Mademoiselle le Rebours was daughter of the president, and, as such, somewhat too strong in law proceedings; she argued so much against the queen, thanks to the insinuations of the queen mother, that the poor girl fell ill. Then Queen Margot, who is no fool, had her advantage and determined that the king should leave Pau for Nérac, so that there was a love cut short."

"Then," said Chicot, "the new passion of the king is for La Fosseuse?"

"Oh, my God, yes; the more so as she is with child. It is madness."

"But what does the queen say?" asked Chicot.

"The queen?" said the officer.

"Yes, the queen."

"The queen lays her griefs at the foot of the cross," said the priest.

"Besides," added the officer, "the queen is ignorant of all these things."

"Oh!" said Chicot, "that is not possible."

"Why not?" asked the officer.

"Because Nérac is not such a large city that one cannot be plainly seen there."

Ah! as to that, monsieur," said the officer, "there is a park, and in this park paths more than three thousand feet in length, planted with cypress, plane trees, and magnificent sycamores; it is so dark that one cannot be seen ten feet away in broad daylight. Imagine what it is at night."

"And then the queen is very much occupied, monsieur," said the priest.

"Bah! occupied?"

"Yes."

"And with whom, if you please?"

"With God, monsieur," replied the priest, haughtily.

"With God!" exclaimed Chicot.

"Why not?"

"Ah! the queen is devoted?"

"Very."

"But there is no mass at the palace, I imagine," said Chicot.

"Then you are wrong in your imagining, monsieur. No mass! Do you take us for heathens? Know, monsieur, that if the king goes to church with his gentlemen, the queen has mass in a private chapel."

"The queen?"

"Yes, yes."

"Queen Marguerite?"

"Queen Marguerite, a proof of which is that I, unworthy priest, won two crowns for having twice officiated in this chapel. I preached a very fine sermon there on the text 'God has separated the wheat from the chaff.' It reads in the Gospel, 'God *will* separate,' but I thought, as the Gospel was written long ago, I thought that the thing had taken place."

"And the king knew of this sermon?" demanded Chicot.

"He heard it."

"Without being angry?"

"On the contrary, he greatly applauded it."

"You astound me," replied Chicot.

"It must be added," said the officer, "that they do not alone go to church and to mass, there are some good banquets at the château, without mentioning the promenades, and I think that nowhere in France are there more courtiers than in the streets of Nérac."

Chicot had obtained more information than he needed to form an entire plan.

He knew Marguerite from having seen her in Paris holding court, and he knew furthermore that if she were but little far-sighted in love affairs, it was when she had some reason for putting a bandage over her eyes.

"*Ventre de biche!*" said he, "in faith, these paths of cypress and three thousand feet of darkness run disagreeably through my head I am going to tell the truth to Nérac, I who come from Paris, to people who have paths three thousand feet long, and such darkness that wives do not see their husbands walking there with their mistresses! By Heaven! they will cut me to pieces to teach me how to interrupt such charming promenades. Fortunately, I know the philosophy of the king, and I trust in it. Besides, I am an ambassador; my head is sacred. So forward!"

And Chicot continued his way.

Towards evening he entered Nérac, at the very hour of the promenades which so greatly occupied the King of France and his ambassador.

For the rest, Chicot was able to convince himself of the informality of the royal habits from the way in which he was given an audience.

A simple valet opened to him the doors of a rustic salon, the approaches to which were studded with flowers. Above this salon were the antechamber of the king and the room which he loved to occupy during the day, in which he gave those unimportant audiences of which he was so prodigal.

An officer, indeed, even a page, informed him when a visitor presented himself. This officer or page ran to find the king, wherever he might be. The king came at this mere invitation, and received the applicant.

Chicot was profoundly impressed by this wholly gracious informality. He thought the king good, honest, and deeply in love. This was his opinion still more, when from the end of a winding path bordered with flowering laurel he saw the King of Navarre coming, an old cap on his head, in a deep green doublet and gray boots, out of breath, a cup and ball in his hand.

Henry had a smooth brow, as though no care dared to brush it with a wing, a smiling mouth, and eyes sparkling with happiness and health.

As he approached, he pulled with his left hand the flowers along the border.

"Who wants to speak to me?" he asked of his page.

"Sire," replied the latter, "a man who seems to me half lord, half soldier."

Chicot overheard the last words, and advanced timidly.

"It is I, sire," said he.

"Ah!" cried the king, raising both arms to Heaven, "Monsieur Chicot in Navarre? Monsieur Chicot with us? *Ventre Saint Gris!* You are welcome, dear Monsieur Chicot."

"A thousand thanks, sire."

"Very much alive, thank God!"

"I hope so, at least, dear sire," said Chicot, transported with joy.

"Ah! by Heaven!" said Henry, "we will drink some Limoux wine together, and you shall tell me what you think of it. You really make me very happy, Monsieur Chicot; be seated."

And he pointed to a grassy bank.

"Never, sire," said Chicot, declining.

"So! Have you ridden two hundred leagues to come and see me, in order for me to let you stand? No, Monsieur Chicot, sit down, sit down; one can talk well only when seated."

"But, sire, the respect!"

"Respect, with us, in Navarre! You are crazy, my poor Chicot, and who, then, thinks of that?"

"No, sire, I am not crazy," replied Chicot; "I am an ambassador."

A slight frown passed over the king's brow; but it disappeared so quickly that Chicot, keen observer though he was, did not even see a trace of it.

"Ambassador," said Henry, with a surprise he strove to render simple; "ambassador from whom?"

"Ambassador from King Henry III. I come from Paris and from the Louvre, sire."

"Ah! that is different, then," said the king, rising from the grassy bench with a sigh. "Go, page, leave us. Send some wine to the first floor, to my room; no, to my cabinet. Come with me, Chicot, I will conduct you."

Chicot followed the King of Navarre. Henry walked more quickly than when he had returned through his path of laurels.

"What misery," thought Chicot, "to come and trouble this

honest man in his peace and ignorance! Bah! he will be philosophical, though."

CHAPTER XLV.

HOW THE KING OF NAVARRE GUESSED THAT *TURENNIUS* MEANT TURENNE AND *MARGOTA*, MARGOT.

The cabinet of the King of Navarre was not very sumptuous, as one may suppose. His Béarnais Majesty was not rich, and with the little he had, he did nothing foolish. This cabinet, with the state sleeping-room, occupied the whole right wing of the château; a corridor ran from the antechamber, or guard-room, and from the sleeping-room; this corridor led to the cabinet. From this spacious apartment, comfortably furnished, although without trace of royal luxury, the eyes looked out on magnificent meadows situated on the bank of the river.

Great willow and plane trees hid the course of the stream, without preventing the eyes from being dazzled from time to time when the river, issuing like a mythological god from its foliage, made the noonday sun glisten with its scales of gold, or the midnight moon with its draperies of silver. The windows, then, looked out upon this magical panorama, terminating in the distance in a chain of hills, somewhat burned by the sun, but which at evening bounded the horizon by violet tints of an admirable clearness, and on the other side on the court of the château.

Lighted thus from the east to the west, by this double row of windows corresponding one with another, red here, blue there, the apartment presented a magnificent appearance, when it lovingly reflected the early rays of the sun or the pearly azure of the rising moon. These natural beauties occupied Chicot less, it must be admitted, than the arrangement of the cabinet, the usual abode of Henry.

In each article of furniture the intelligent ambassador seemed indeed to seek a letter, and this with much more attention as the combination of these letters would give him the answer to the enigma which he had been trying so long to solve, and which he had been trying to solve more particularly during his journey.

The king seated himself, with his usual good nature and his eternal smile, in a great leather armchair with gilt nails and wire fringe; Chicot, to obey him, rolled opposite to him a folding-chair or rather a stool covered in the same manner and enriched with similar ornaments.

Henry looked fixedly at Chicot, smiling, as we have already said, but at the same time with an earnestness which a courtier would have found wearisome.

"You will find that I am very curious, dear Monsieur Chicot," began the king, "and my curiosity is stronger than myself; I have so long looked upon you as dead that, in spite of all the joy that your resurrection causes me, I cannot grow accustomed to the idea that you are alive. Why did you so suddenly disappear from this world?"

"Well! sire," said Chicot, with his customary freedom, "you disappeared from Vincennes. Each one vanishes according to his means, and especially his needs."

"You always did have more wit than any one else, dear Monsieur Chicot," said Henry, "and it is especially from this that I know I am not speaking to your shade."

Then assuming a serious air.

"But come," said he, "shall we put wit aside and speak of business?"

"If that does not weary your majesty too much, I am at your command."

The king's eyes shone.

"Weary me!" said he.

Then in another tone:

"It is true that I grow rusty here," he continued calmly; "but I am not weary, inasmuch as I have done nothing. Now to-day Henry of Navarre has greatly exercised his body here and there, but the king has not yet operated his mind."

"Sire, I am very glad of it," replied Chicot; "as the ambassador of a king, your relative and friend, I have some very delicate commissions to execute with your majesty.

"Speak quickly, then, for you arouse my curiosity."

"Sire"—

"Your letters of credit first. This is a useless formality, I know, since it concerns you; but, after all, I want to show you, that thorough Béarnais peasant that we are, we know our duty as king."

"Sire, I ask your majesty's pardon," replied Chicot, "but

everything I had in the way of letters of credit I drowned in the rivers, threw into the fire, scattered to the air."

"And why, dear Monsieur Chicot?"

"Because one does not travel when one sets out for Navarre, on an embassy, as one travels when one goes to buy cloth at Lyons, and because if one has the dangerous honor of carrying royal letters, one runs the risk of carrying them only to the dead."

"That is true," said Henry, with perfect good nature, "the roads are not safe, and in Navarre, in default of money, we are obliged to trust to the honesty of the peasants; but they are not great thieves."

"What!" cried Chicot, "why, they are lambs, they are little angels, but only in Navarre."

"Ah! ah!" said Henry.

"Yes, indeed, outside of Navarre, one meets wolves and vultures about every prey; I was a prey, sire, so that I had my vultures and my wolves."

"But they did not wholly devour you, I am glad to see."

"*Ventre de biche*, sire, it was not their fault! They did all they could in that respect. But they found me too tough, and could not cut into my skin. But sire, if you please, let us leave the details of my journey, which are idle matters, and return to our letter of credit."

"But since you have none, dear Monsieur Chicot," said Henry, "it appears to me quite useless to return to it."

"That is, I have not one now, but I had one."

"Ah, good! give it to me, Monsieur Chicot."

And Henry extended his hand.

"This is where the trouble is, sire," said Chicot; "I had a letter, as I have had the honor of telling your majesty, and few people could have had a better one."

"You lost it?"

"I hastened to destroy it, sire, for Monsieur de Mayenne was running after me to steal it from me."

"Cousin Mayenne?"

"In person."

"Fortunately he does not run very fast. Is he still growing fat?"

"*Ventre de biche!* Not just now, I presume."

"And why not?"

"Because in running, sire, he had the misfortune to over-

take me, and in the encounter, faith, he received a good sword-thrust."

"And the letter?"

"Not a shadow of it, thanks to the precaution which I had taken."

"Bravo! you were wrong not to want to tell me of your journey, Monsieur Chicot; tell me in detail, for it interests me greatly."

"Your majesty is very kind."

"But one thing troubles me."

"Which?"

"If this letter is destroyed for Monsieur de Mayenne, it is also destroyed for me; how, then, am I to know what my good brother Henry wrote me, since his letter no longer exists?"

"Pardon, sire; it exists in my memory."

"How so?"

"Before destroying it I learned it by heart."

"Excellent idea, Monsieur Chicot, excellent, and I recognize in it the wit of a countryman. You will recite it to me, will you not?"

"Willingly, sire."

"Just as it was, without changing anything?"

"Without giving a single wrong meaning to it."

"What do you say?"

"I say that I will tell it to you faithfully; although I do not understand the language, I have a good memory."

"What language?"

"The Latin language."

"I do not understand you," said Henry, with his clear glance fixed on Chicot, "you speak of the Latin language, of the letter"—

"No doubt."

"Explain yourself. Was the letter from my brother, then, written in Latin?"

"Well! yes, sire."

"Why in Latin?"

"Ah! sire, no doubt because the Latin is a bold language, a language that can say everything, the language with which Perseus and Juvenal perpetuated the foolishness and the errors of kings."

"Of kings?"

"And of queens, sire."

The brow of the king began to wrinkle in its wide orbit.

"I mean of emperors and empresses," said Chicot.

"You know Latin, then, Monsieur Chicot?" asked Henry, coldly.

"Yes, and no, sire."

"You are very fortunate if it is yes, for you have a great advantage over me, who do not know it; I never could go seriously to mass on account of this devilish Latin; so you understand it, do you?"

"I was taught to read it, sire, as well as Greek and Hebrew."

"That is very fortunate, Monsieur Chicot; you are a living book."

"Your majesty has found the word, a living book. They imprint a few pages in my memory, they despatch me whither they will; I arrive, they read me and understand me."

"Or they do not understand you."

"How so, sire?"

"Why! if they do not know the language with which you are imprinted."

"Oh! sire, kings know everything."

"That is what is said to the people, Monsieur Chicot, and what flatterers say to kings."

"Then, sire, it is useless for me to recite to your majesty the letter which I learned by heart, since neither of us would understand anything of it."

"Has not the Latin a great analogy to the Italian?"

"They say so, sire."

"And to the Spanish?"

"Very great, so I am told."

"Then let us try; I know a little Italian, my Gascon patois greatly resembles the Spanish, perhaps I may understand Latin without ever having studied it."

Chicot bowed.

"Your majesty commands, then?"

"That is, I beg you, dear Monsieur Chicot."

Chicot began with the following phrase, which he covered with all sorts of preambles:

"*Frater carissime,*

"*Sincerus amor quo te prosequebatur germanus noster Carolus nonus, functus nuper, colet usque regiam nostram et pectori meo pertinaciter adhœret.*"

Henry did not move an eyelash, but at the last word he stopped Chicot by a gesture.

"Either I am greatly mistaken," said he, "or they speak in this sentence of love, obstinacy, and of my brother Charles IX ?"

"I would not deny it," said Chicot; "Latin is such a beautiful language that all that might be contained in one phrase."

"Continue," said the king.

Chicot resumed.

The Béarnais listened with the same indifference to all the passages in which there was any reference to his wife and the Vicomte of Turenne; but at the last name:

"Does not *Turennius* mean Turenne ?" he asked.

"I think so, sire."

"And *Margota*, is not that the pet name which my brothers Charles IX. and Henry III. give to their sister, my well-loved wife Marguerite ?"

"I see nothing impossible in it," replied Chicot.

And he continued his recital to the end of the last phrase, without the king's face once having changed its expression. Finally he stopped at the peroration, the style of which he caressed with so sonorous an accent that one would have said it was a paragraph from the Verrines, or from the discourse on the poet Archias.

"Is it finished ?" asked Henry.

"Yes, sire."

"Well, it must be superb."

"Is it not, sire ?"

"What a misfortune that I understand only two words of it, *Turennius et Margota !* and yet" —

"An irreparable misfortune, sire, unless your majesty decides to have the letter translated by some scholar."

"Oh ! no," said Henry, quickly; "and you yourself, Monsieur Chicot, who have shown so much discretion in your embassy by destroying the original autograph, you would not advise me, would you, to deliver this letter to the public ?"

"I do not say that, sire."

"But you think it ?"

"I think, since your majesty asks me, that the letter from the King, your brother, recommended to me with such care, and sent to your majesty by a special envoy, contains here and there perhaps some good point by which your majesty might profit."

"Yes, but to confide these good points to any one, I must have perfect confidence in the person."

"Certainly."

"Well! do one thing," said Henry, as though illumined by an idea.

"What?"

"Go and find my wife Margota; she is learned. Recite the letter to her; she will understand it, surely. Then, very naturally, she will explain it to me."

"Ah! that is admirable!" cried Chicot, "and your majesty does just the right thing."

"Do I not? Go to her."

"I will run to her, sire."

"But do not change a word of the letter."

"That would be impossible for me; I should have to know Latin, and I do not know it; some barbarism at best."

"Go to her, my friend, go."

Chicot made inquiries as to how to find Madame Marguerite, and left the king, more convinced than ever that the latter was an enigma.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE ALLEY OF THE THREE THOUSAND FEET.

The queen occupied the other wing of the château, divided in almost the same way as that which Chicot had just left.

From that direction there was always some music to be heard, some plume to be seen floating about. The famous Alley of the Three Thousand Feet, which had been so much discussed, began at the very windows of Marguerite, and her eyes never lingered on any but pleasant objects, clusters of flowers, green bowers, etc.

One would have said that the poor princess strove by the sight of happy objects to chase away the many lugubrious ideas that dwelt among the depths of her thoughts. A Perigourdin poet — Marguerite in the provinces, as in Paris, was always the star of poets — a Perigourdin poet had composed a sonnet in her honor. "She wishes," he said, "by the care she takes to place a garrison in her heart, to chase away every sad memory."

Born at the foot of the throne, daughter, sister, and wife of a king, Marguerite had indeed suffered deeply.

Her philosophy, more boastful than that of the King of Navarre, was less solid, because it was only artificial and the result of study, while that of the king sprang from a natural source. Then Marguerite, philosopher that she was, or rather that she wished to be, had already let time and grief stamp their expressive furrows on her face.

Nevertheless, she still possessed remarkable beauty, beauty of physiognomy especially, that which least attracts among people of vulgar rank, but which is most pleasing among the eminent, to whom one is ever ready to grant the supremacy of physical beauty.

Marguerite had a bright and kindly smile, a gentle and brilliant eye, supple and caressing gestures. Marguerite, we have said, was still an adorable creature.

As a woman, she walked like a princess; as queen, she had the carriage of a charming woman.

So she was idolized at Nérac, whither she brought elegance, joy, and life.

She, a Parisian princess, had borne in patience her sojourn in the province; this was already a virtue with which the people of the provinces were greatly pleased.

Her court was not merely a court of gentlemen and ladies; every one loved her at once, as queen and as woman; and as a matter of fact, the harmony of her flutes and violins, like the odor and the leavings of her banquets, were for every one.

She knew how to make such use of time that each day brought her something, and so that none were lost for those about her.

Full of hatred for her enemies, but patient in order the better to avenge herself; feeling instinctively under the covering of carelessness and forbearance of Henry of Navarre his ill will for her and his constant realization of each one of her misdeeds; without relatives, without friends, Marguerite had grown accustomed to living with love, or at least with the semblance of love, and to replacing by poetry and comfort family, husband, and friends.

No one except Catharine de Medicis, no one except Chicot, no one except a few melancholy spirits who had returned from the sombre kingdom of death, no one could have told why Marguerite's cheeks were already so pale, why her eyes were

involuntarily drowned in unknown sorrows, why indeed that deep heart let its void be seen even in her glance that was once so expressive. Marguerite no longer had intimates.

The poor queen wished no more, since the others had sold her confidence and her happiness for money.

Therefore she walked alone, and this perhaps, without their suspecting it themselves, increased in the eyes of the Navarrese the dignity of her attitude, more clearly set off by her isolation.

For the rest, this ill humor which she felt in Henry was wholly instinctive, and came rather from her own consciousness of her wrongs than from the actions of the Béarnais.

Henry treated her like a daughter of France; he addressed her only with obsequious politeness, or with gracious ease; he acted towards her on every occasion and in all matters like a husband and a friend.

So the court of Nérac, like all other courts living in easy relations, overflowed in physical and moral harmonies.

Such were the studies and the reflections which Chicot, the most observing and the most scrupulous of men, made from appearances as yet very slight.

Instructed by Henry, he had at first presented himself at the palace, but he had found no one there.

Marguerite, they had told him, was at the end of the beautiful alley running parallel with the river, and he betook himself to this alley, which was the famous Alley of the Three Thousand Feet, through that of the oleanders.

When he had gone two-thirds down the alley he perceived at the end, beneath a bower of Spanish jasmine, broom, and clematis, a group covered with ribbons, feathers, swords, and velvet; perhaps all this beautiful frippery was somewhat worn and old fashioned; but for Nérac it was brilliant and dazzling. Even Chicot, who had come straight from Paris, was satisfied with a glance.

As a page of the king preceded Chicot, the queen, whose eyes wandered here and there with the constant restlessness of a melancholy heart, recognized the colors of Navarre and called him.

"What do you want, D'Aubiac?" she asked.

The young man, we might well say the child, for he was scarcely more than twelve years old, blushed, and bent his knee before Marguerite.

"Madame," said he in French, for the queen required that the patois be banished from all service and business matters, "a gentleman from Paris sent from the Louvre to his majesty the King of Navarre, and by him sent to you, desires to speak with your majesty."

A flush suddenly spread over the beautiful face of Marguerite; she turned quickly and with that painful sensation which on every occasion penetrates hearts long bruised.

Chicot stood motionless twenty feet from her.

Her subtle eyes recognized a well-known figure in his bearing and side face, for the Gascon was outlined against the yellow background of the sky; she left the circle, instead of commanding the newcomer to approach. However, in turning back to bid the company adieu, she made a sign with the tips of her fingers to one of the most richly dressed and handsomest of the gentlemen.

This adieu for all was really an adieu for one alone. But as the privileged cavalier seemed not without anxiety, in spite of the salutation which was meant to reassure him, and as the eye of a woman sees everything:

"Monsieur de Turenne," said Marguerite, "will you kindly say to the ladies that I will return in a moment?"

The handsome gentleman in the white and blue doublet bowed with more agility than an indifferent courtier would have done.

The queen advanced with rapid steps to Chicot, who, without moving a foot, had taken in the whole of the scene, so thoroughly in harmony with the phrases of the letter which he brought.

"Monsieur Chicot!" cried Marguerite, astonished, approaching the Gascon.

"At your majesty's feet," said Chicot. "Your majesty, always kind and always beautiful, and always queen at Nérac as at the Louvre."

"It is a miracle to see you so far from Paris, monsieur."

"Pardon me, madame, for it is not poor Chicot who had the idea of performing this miracle."

"I thought that you were dead."

"I pretended to be dead."

"What do you want with us, Monsieur Chicot; am I fortunate enough to be remembered in France as Queen of Navarre?"

"Oh! madame," said Chicot, smiling, "you may be sure we do not forget queens, when they are of your age, and have your beauty."

"They are still gallant at Paris?"

"The King of France," added Chicot, without replying to the last question, "even writes on this subject to the King of Navarre."

Marguerite blushed.

"He writes?" she asked.

"Yes, madame."

"And you have brought the letter?"

"No, not brought, for reasons which the King of Navarre will explain to you, but learned by heart and ready to repeat from memory."

"I understand. This letter was of importance, and you feared that it might be lost or stolen from you?"

"That is the truth, madame; now if your majesty will excuse me, but the letter was written in Latin."

"Oh! very well!" exclaimed the queen, "you know that I understand Latin."

"And the King of Navarre," asked Chicot, "does he understand it?"

"Dear Monsieur Chicot," replied Marguerite, "it is very difficult to know what the King of Navarre knows or does not know."

"Ah! ah!" said Chicot, happy to see that he was not the only one seeking for the answer to the enigma.

"If appearances are to be believed," continued Marguerite, "he knows it very slightly, for he never understands, or at least he does not seem to understand when I speak in this language to any one at court."

Chicot bit his lips.

"Ah! the devil!" said he.

"Have you repeated this letter to him?" asked Marguerite.

"It was to him it was addressed."

"And did he seem to understand it?"

"Only two words."

"Which ones?"

"*Turennius* and *Margota*."

"*Turennius* and *Margota?*"

"Yes, these two words are in the letter."

"Then what did he do?"

"He sent me to you, madame."

"To me?"

"Yes, saying that this letter seemed to contain too important matters to be translated by a stranger, and that he preferred it to be heard by you, who were the most beautiful of scholars and the most scholarly of beautiful women."

"I will listen to you, Monsieur Chicot, since it is the command of the king that I hear you."

"Thank you, madame; where will it please your majesty that I should speak?"

"Here; no, no, in my own apartments, rather; come to my cabinet, I beg you."

Marguerite looked earnestly at Chicot, who, out of pity for her, perhaps, had let her see in advance a corner of the truth.

The poor woman felt the need of a support, of a last return to love before undergoing the ordeal which threatened her.

"Vicomte," said she to Monsieur de Turenne, "your arm as far as the château. Precede us, Monsieur Chicot, I beg you."

CHAPTER XLVII.

MARGUERITE'S CABINET.

We would not be accused of describing only festoons and flowers, and of scarcely letting the reader escape through the garden; but like master, like lodgings, and if it has not been useless to describe the Alley of the Three Thousand Feet and Henry's cabinet, it may also be of some interest to describe the cabinet of Marguerite.

Parallel to that of Henry, with separate doors opening upon rooms and passages, with windows, complaisant and mute as the doors, closed by blinds with iron locks whose keys turned without noise, — such was the exterior of the queen's cabinet.

Within, modern furniture, hangings of the present fashion, pictures, enamels, china, costly arms, books and manuscripts in Greek, Latin, and French, piled on every table, birds in their cages, dogs on the rugs, a whole world, in fact, vegetable and animal, living a common life with Marguerite.

People of superior intellects or superabundant spirits can-

not walk alone in life; they accompany each of their feelings, each of their inclinations, with everything harmonious to them, and which their attractive force drops into the whirlpool, so that instead of having lived and felt like ordinary people, they have increased their sensations tenfold, and doubled their existence.

Certainly Epicurus is a hero for humanity; the pagans themselves did not understand him; he was a severe philosopher, but one who by force of willing that nothing should be lost in the sum of our means and resources procured, by his inflexible economy, pleasures for whoever, acting wholly spiritually or bestially, would have perceived nothing but privations or afflictions.

But we have inveighed a great deal against Epicurus without knowing him, and we have praised him a great deal, also without understanding those pious recluses of the Thebaid who annihilated the good in human nature by neutralizing the bad. Killing a man is killing his passions also, no doubt, but it is killing, nevertheless, a thing which God forbids with all his force and by all his laws.

The queen was a woman who understood Epicurus, in Greek, in the first place, which was the least of her merits; she occupied her life so well that from a thousand griefs she knew how to create a pleasure, which in her quality of Christian gave her the opportunity to bless God more often than another, let Him be called God or Theòs, Jehovah or Magog. All this digression clearly shows the necessity of our describing the apartments of Marguerite. Chicot was invited to be seated in a beautiful and comfortable armchair covered with tapestry representing Love scattering a cloud of flowers; a page, who was not D'Aubiac, but who was more beautifully and more richly dressed, offered some refreshments to the messenger. Chicot did not accept, but when the Vicomte de Turenne had left the room he began to recite with unfailing memory the letter from the King of France and Poland, by the grace of God.

We know this letter, which we read in the original at the same time as Chicot; we believe, therefore, that it is wholly useless to give a Latin translation of it.

Chicot recited the translation with the strangest possible accent, in order that the queen might be as long as possible in understanding it; but skilful as he was in disguising his own

work, Marguerite at once seized its meaning, and in no way concealed her fury and indignation.

As he advanced in the letter, Chicot sank deeper and deeper into the quagmire he had created for himself; at certain delicate passages he bent his head like a confessor embarrassed at what he hears; and in this play of features he had a great advantage, for he did not see the eyes of the queen flash and each of her nerves shrink at the open statements concerning her conjugal misdemeanors.

Marguerite was not ignorant of the keen ill humor of her brother. Numerous occasions had proved it to her; she knew also, for she was not a woman to dissemble anything to herself, she knew how much to rely on the pretexts which she had furnished, and on those which she could still furnish; so in proportion as Chicot read, the balance established itself in her mind between legitimate anger and reasonable fear.

To be indignant at the right time, to mistrust at the proper moment, to avoid danger by repelling injury, to prove injustice by profiting by advice, this was the great work which was going on in Marguerite's mind, while Chicot continued his epistolary recitation.

It must not be supposed that Chicot stood with his head continually bent down; he raised first one eye, then the other, and reassured himself by seeing that beneath her half-frowning brows the queen was making up her mind.

He therefore concluded with great tranquillity the salutations of the royal letter.

"By the holy communion!" said the queen, when Chicot had finished, "my brother writes prettily in Latin; what vehemence! what style! I should never have believed such strength was in him."

Chicot made a movement of his eyes, and opened his hands like a man who has the manner of approving out of politeness, but who does not understand.

"You do not understand?" said the queen, to whom every language was familiar, even that of mimicry. "I believed you, however, to be a good Latin scholar, monsieur."

"Madame, I have forgotten; all that I know to-day, all that remains to me of my former knowledge, is that the Latin has no article, that it has a vocative case, and that 'head' is of the neuter gender."

"Ah! indeed!" exclaimed a person, entering cheerfully and noisily.

Chicot and the queen turned at the same moment. It was the King of Navarre.

"What!" said Henry, approaching, "'head' in Latin is of the neuter gender, Monsieur Chicot? And why is it not of the masculine gender?"

"Ah, sire," said Chicot, "I know nothing about it, except that it surprises me as it does your majesty."

"And it surprises me also," said Margot, dreamily.

"It ought to be," said the King, "because it is now the man, and now the woman who is master, according to the temperament of the man or the woman."

Chicot bowed.

"That is certainly the best reason I know, sire," said he.

"So much the better. I am delighted to be a deeper philosopher than I thought. Now let us return to the letter; you must know, madame, that I am burning to hear the news from the court of France, and that is just what this good Monsieur Chicot brings me in an unknown language; without which"—

"Without which?" repeated Marguerite.

"Without which, I should be delighted, *ventre Saint Gris!* You know how much I like news, and especially scandal, which my brother Henry of Valois knows so well how to tell."

And Henry of Navarre sat down, rubbing his hands.

"Come, Monsieur Chicot," continued the King, with the manner of a man who is prepared thoroughly to enjoy himself, "you have recited this famous letter to my wife, have you not?"

"Yes, sire."

"Well! my love, tell me a little of what this famous letter contains."

"Do you not fear, sire," said Chicot, put at ease by the liberty of which the two crowned heads set him the example, "that this Latin in which the letter in question is written is an evil prognostic?"

"Why?" asked the King.

Then turning to his wife:

"Well, madame?" he demanded.

Marguerite pondered an instant, as though she was taking up, to comment on them one by one, the phrases which had fallen from Chicot's lips.

"Our messenger is right, sire," said she, when her examination was over and her mind made up, "the Latin is an evil prognostic."

"What!" cried Henry, "does this dear letter contain ugly news? Take care, my love, the King your brother is a scholar of great strength and exquisite politeness."

"Even when he had me insulted in my litter, which took place a few leagues from Sens, when I had left Paris to rejoin you, sire."

"When one has a brother of severe morals himself," said Henry, in the indefinable tone which was midway between jest and earnest, "a brother who is King, a brother punctilious"—

"Who ought to be so for the true honor of his sister, and of his house; for indeed, I do not suppose, sire, that if Catherine d'Albret, your sister, caused some scandal, that you would have the scandal reported by a captain of the guards."

"Oh, as for me," said Henry, "I am a patriarchal and gentle bourgeois; I am not king, or if I am, it is for fun, and in faith! I have fun. But the letter, the letter, since it is addressed to me, I want to know what it contains."

"It is a perfidious letter, sire."

"Bah!"

"Oh, yes, and it contains more calumnies than are necessary to embroil not only a husband with his wife, but a friend with all his friends."

"Oh! oh!" said Henry, sitting up straight and arming his face, naturally so frank and open, with affected defiance, "embroil a husband and wife, you and me, then!"

"You and me, sire."

"And in what respect, my love?"

Chicot felt himself on thorns, and he would have given much, although he was very hungry, to go to bed without supper.

"The cloud is about to burst!" he murmured to himself. "The cloud is about to burst!"

"Sire," said the queen, "I greatly regret that your majesty has forgotten the Latin, which you must have been taught, however."

"Madame, I no longer remember a thing of all the Latin I learned except this phrase: *Deus et virtus æterna;* a singular combination of the masculine, feminine, and neuter, which

my professor could never explain except by the Greek, which I understood still less than Latin."

"Sire," continued the queen, "if you understood, you would see in the letter a great many compliments of all kinds to me."

"Oh! very good," said the king.

"*Optime*," said Chicot.

"But how," said Henry, "can compliments to you embroil us, madame? for indeed, so long as my brother Henry pays you compliments, I shall agree with my brother Henry; if evil were said of you in this letter, ah! that would be a different thing, madame, and I should understand the policy of my brother."

"Ah! if evil were said of me, you would understand Henry's policy?"

"Yes, Henry of Valois'; he has reasons for embroiling us, which I well know."

"Wait, then, sire, for these compliments are nothing but an insinuating exordium to arrive at calumniating insinuations against your friends and mine."

And having boldly uttered these words, Marguerite waited for a contradiction.

Chicot lowered his head; Henry shrugged his shoulders.

"See, my love," said he, "if after all you have not understood the Latin too well, and if this evil intention is really in your brother's letter."

Gently and impressively as Henry uttered these words, the Queen of Navarre shot at him a glance full of mistrust.

"Understand me to the end, sire," said she.

"I ask nothing better, madame, God is my witness," replied Henry.

"Have you need or not of your subjects, come?"

"Have I need of them, my love? What a question! What should I do without them, and reduced to my own strength, my God!"

"Well! sire, the King wishes to detach from you your best subjects."

"I defy him to do so."

"Bravo, sire!" murmured Chicot.

"Ah! no doubt," said Henry, with that astonishing good nature which was so peculiar to him, by which, to the end of his life, every one let himself be caught; "for my servants are

attached to me from love and not from interest. I have nothing to give them.'

"You give them all your heart, all your faith, sire; it is the best return from a king to his friends."

"Yes, my love; well?"

"Well, sire, have no more faith in them."

"*Ventre Saint Gris!* I shall take away my faith only if they force me to do so; that is, if they do not deserve it."

"Good, then," said Marguerite, "we will prove to you that they do not deserve it, sire, that is all."

"Ah! ah!" said the king, "but in what respect?"

Chicot again lowered his head, as he did at every delicate point.

"I cannot tell you that, sire," replied Marguerite, "without compromising" —

And she looked around her.

Chicot understood that he embarrassed her, and drew back.

"Dear messenger," said the king to him, "be good enough to wait for me in my cabinet; the queen has something private to say to me, something very useful for my service, apparently."

Marguerite remained motionless, with the exception of a slight nod of the head which Chicot thought he alone caught. Seeing, therefore, that he would please both husband and wife by withdrawing, he rose and left the chamber, with a final bow directed to both.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

COMPOSITION IN TRANSLATION.

To eliminate this witness whom Marguerite supposed stronger in Latin than he wished to admit was already a triumph, or at least a pledge of security for her, for, as we have said, Marguerite did not believe Chicot as uneducated as he wished to appear, while all alone with her husband, she could give to each Latin word more scope or commentary than all the scholiasts in us ever gave to Plautus or Perseus, those two enigmas in epic verse of the Latin world.

Henry and his wife, therefore, had the satisfaction of a tête-à-tête. The king wore on his face no appearance of

anxiety, nor any suspicion of foreboding. Decidedly the king did not understand Latin.

"Monsieur," said Marguerite, "I am waiting for you to question me."

"This letter is troubling you greatly, my love," said he; "do not be so alarmed about it."

"Sire, it is because the letter is or ought to be an event; a king does not send a messenger to another king in this way except for reasons of the greatest importance."

"Well, then," said Henry, "let us leave the message and the messenger, my love. Have you not something like a ball on hand for this evening?"

"We had planned one, sire," said Marguerite, surprised, "but there is nothing unusual in that. You know that we dance almost every evening."

"I have a great hunt on hand for to-morrow, a great hunt."

"Ah!"

"Yes, a battle of wolves."

"Each of us has our pleasure, sire; you love the hunt, I the ball; you hunt, I dance."

"Yes, my love," said Henry, sighing; "and, in truth, there is no harm in that."

"Certainly not, but your majesty says it with a sigh."

"Listen to me, madame."

Marguerite became all attention.

"I am troubled."

"About what, sire?"

"About a rumor which is going around."

"A rumor? Your majesty is troubled over a rumor?"

"What more natural, my love, when this rumor may cause you pain?"

"Me?"

"Yes, you."

"Sire, I do not understand you."

"Have you heard nothing?" said Henry in the same tone.

Marguerite began to tremble seriously lest this was a mode of attack on the part of her husband.

"I am the most curious woman in the world, sire," said she, "and I never hear what they din into my ears. Moreover, I put so little value on what you call these rumors that I scarcely hear them even when listening; all the more reason, then, for me to close my ears when they pass."

"It is your opinion, then, madame, that we should ignore all these rumors?"

"Absolutely, sire, and especially we royal people."

"Why we especially, madame?"

"Because we, being on every tongue, should indeed have too much to do if we troubled about ourselves."

"Well, I think that you are right, my love, and I will give you an excellent opportunity to apply your philosophy."

Marguerite thought the decisive moment had come. She summoned all her courage, and in a firm voice said:

"So be it, sire, with the greatest pleasure."

Henry began in the tone of a penitent who has some great sin to confess:

"You know the great interest which I take in my little maid Fosseuse?"

"Ah! ah!" cried Marguerite, seeing that it was not a question of herself, and assuming an air of triumph; "yes, yes, in little Fosseuse, your friend."

"Yes, madame," replied Henry, still in the same tone, "yes, in little Fosseuse."

"My maid of honor?"

"Your maid of honor."

"Your folly, your love."

"Ah! you speak now, my love, like one of those rumors you were reviling just now."

"That is true, sire," said Marguerite, "and I humbly beg your pardon for it."

"My love, you are right; public rumor often lies, and we have, we royal people especially, great need of establishing this theorem as an axiom. *Ventre Saint Gris!* madame, I believe I am speaking Greek."

And Henry burst out laughing.

Marguerite read irony in this noisy laughter, and especially in the sharp glance which accompanied it.

Some anxiety seized her.

"Fosseuse, then?" said she.

"Fosseuse is ill, my love; and the physicians understand nothing about her malady."

"That is strange, sire. Fosseuse, according to the words of your majesty, has always been virtuous; Fosseuse, who, according to you, would have resisted a king had a king spoken to her of love, Fosseuse, that flower of purity, that limpid crys-

tal, must let the eye of science penetrate to the depths of her joys and her griefs!"

"Alas! it is not so," said Henry, sadly.

"What!" exclaimed the queen, with that impetuous spitefulness which the most superior woman never fails to hurl like a dart at another woman; "what! Fosseuse is not a flower of purity?"

"I did not say that," replied Henry, drily; "God keep me from accusing any one! I say my friend Fosseuse is attacked by a malady which she obstinately hides from the physicians."

"From the physicians? Yes; but from you, her confidant, her friend, — that seems very strange to me."

"I do not know much about it, my love," replied Henry, resuming his gracious smile, "or if I know much about it, I think best to stop at that."

"Then, sire," said Marguerite, who believed she guessed from the tone of the conversation that she had the advantage, and that it was for her to grant forgiveness, when, on the contrary, she had thought to beg for it, "then, sire, I do not know what your majesty desires, and I wait for you to explain yourself."

"Well, since you wait for me, my love, I will tell you everything."

Marguerite made a sign showing that she was ready to hear everything.

"You must" — continued Henry, "but it is asking too much of you, my love" —

"Nevertheless, tell me, sire."

"You must have the kindness to go to my dear Fosseuse."

"I visit this girl, who, they say, has the honor of being your mistress, an honor which you do not deny?"

"Come, come, gently, my love," said the King. "On my word, you would cause a scandal with these exclamations, and I do not really know whether the scandal which you might cause would not delight the court of France, for in this letter from the King, my brother-in-law, which Chicot recited to me, there was *quotidie scandalum*, that is, for a sad humanist like myself, daily scandal."

Marguerite made a movement.

"One need not know Latin for that," continued Henry; "it is almost French."

"But, sire, to whom could these words be applied?" asked Marguerite.

"Ah! that is what I could not understand. But you who know Latin, you can help me when we reach that point, my love."

Marguerite blushed to her ears, while, with head lowered and hand raised, Henry looked as though he were simply trying to find out to what person at court the *quotidie scandalum* could be applied.

"Well, monsieur," said the queen, "you wish in the name of peace to urge me to a humiliating step; in the name of peace I will obey."

"Thank you, my love," said Henry, "thank you."

"But this visit, monsieur; what is its object?"

"It is very simple, madame."

"Still I shall have to be told, since I am simple enough not to guess it."

"Well, you will find Fosseuse in the midst of the maids of honor, lying down in their room. These women, you know, are so curious and so indiscreet that no one knows to what extremity Fosseuse may be driven."

"But she fears something, then?" cried Marguerite, with an increase of anger and hatred; "she is anxious to hide?"

"I do not know," said Henry; "what I do know is that she must leave the chamber of the maids of honor."

"If she wishes to hide, she need not count on me; I can close my eyes to some things, but I will never be an accomplice to them."

And Marguerite awaited the effect of her ultimatum.

But Henry seemed to have heard nothing; he had let his head fall forward again, and had resumed that pensive attitude which had struck Marguerite an instant before.

"*Margota*," he murmured, "*Margota cum Turennio.* Those are the two words I am trying to understand, madame, *Margota cum Turennio.*"

This time Marguerite grew crimson.

"Calumnies! sire," she cried, "are you going to repeat calumnies to me?"

"What calumnies?" said Henry, in the most natural tone in the world; "do you see calumnies in that, madame? It is a passage from my brother's letter which comes back to me: *Margota cum Turennio conveniunt in castello nomine Loignac.*

Decidedly I shall be obliged to have this letter translated by a scholar."

"Come, let us cease this play, sire," said Marguerite, trembling, "and tell me frankly what you expect of me."

"Well, I did want you, my love, to take Fosseuse away from the maids, put her in a room by herself, and send her only one physician, a discreet physician, yours, for instance."

"Oh! I see how it is!" exclaimed the queen, "Fosseuse, who extolled her virtue, Fosseuse, who boasted of assumed modesty, Fosseuse is with child, and is about to be confined."

"I do not say that, my love," said Henry. "I do not say that; it is you who affirm it."

"That is it, monsieur, that is it!" cried Marguerite; "your insinuating tone, your false humility, prove it to me. But there are sacrifices which one, king though he be, does not demand of his wife. Undo yourself the wrongs to Mademoiselle de Fosseuse, sire; you are her accomplice; this concerns you. To the guilty the punishment, and not to the innocent."

"To the guilty, good! that again reminds me of the words of that frightful letter."

"How so?"

"Yes, guilty is *nocens*, is it not?"

"Yes, monsieur, *nocens*."

"Well! There is in the letter: *Margota cum Turennio, ambo nocentes, conveniunt in castello nomine Loignac.* My God! how sorry I am that my mind is not as educated as my memory is faultless!"

"*Ambo nocentes*," repeated Marguerite, in a low tone, paler than her lace collar; "he understands, he understands."

"*Margota cum Turennio, ambo nocentes.* What the devil did my brother mean by *ambo?*" went on Henry of Navarre, pitilessly. "*Ventre Saint Gris!* my love, it is very surprising that, knowing Latin as you do, you have not yet given me the explanation of this phrase which troubles me."

"Sire, I have had the honor of already telling you" —

"Well! by Heaven!" interrupted the King; "there is *Turennius* walking under your windows, and looking up as though he were waiting for you, poor fellow. I will sign to him to come up; he is very learned and can tell me what I want to know."

"Sire! sire!" cried Marguerite, rising in her chair and

clasping her hands; "sire, be greater than all these mischief makers and slanderers of France."

"Well! my love, we are no more indulgent in Navarre than in France, it seems to me, and just now you yourself were very severe in regard to poor Fosseuse."

"Severe, I!" cried Marguerite.

"Well! I appeal to your memory; in this, however, we ought to be indulgent, madame; we lead such a peaceful life, you at the balls which you love, I in the hunt which I adore"—

"Yes, yes, sire," said Marguerite, "you are right, let us be indulgent."

"Oh! I was very sure of your heart, my love."

"It is because you know me, sire."

"Yes. You will go and see Fosseuse, then, will you not?"

"Yes, sire."

"And take her away from the other maids?"

"Yes, sire."

"And give her your own physician?"

"Yes, sire."

"And no nurse. Physicians are discreet by profession, nurses are talkative from habit."

"That is true, sire."

"And if, unfortunately, what they say is true, and that the poor girl has really been weak and succumbed"—

Henry raised his eyes to Heaven.

"Which is possible," he continued. "Woman is a fragile thing, *res fragilis mulier*, as the Gospel says."

"Well, sire, I am a woman, and know the indulgence which I should have for other women."

"Ah! you know everything, my love; in truth, you are a model of perfection and"—

"And?"

"And I will kiss your hands."

"But believe me, sire," said Marguerite, "it is for love of you alone that I make such a sacrifice."

"Oh! oh!" said Henry, "I know you perfectly, madame, and my brother in France also, who speaks so well of you in this letter, and who adds: *Fiat sanum exemplum statim, atque res certior eveniet.* This good example, no doubt, my love, is the one you give."

And Henry kissed the half-frozen hand of Marguerite.

Then pausing on the threshold:

"A thousand kindnesses from me to Fosseuse, madame," said he; "take care of her as you have promised me to do. As for me, I go to hunt; perhaps I shall not see you until my return, perhaps never — those wolves are treacherous beasts; come, let me embrace you, my love."

He embraced Marguerite almost affectionately, and went away leaving her stupefied at everything she had just heard.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE SPANISH AMBASSADOR.

The king rejoined Chicot in his cabinet.

Chicot was still thoroughly agitated with fears as to the explanation.

"Well, Chicot," said Henry.

"Well, sire," replied Chicot.

"You do not know what the queen pretends?"

"No."

"She pretends that your cursed Latin will cause trouble to our entire household."

"Well, sire," exclaimed Chicot, "for God's sake let us forget this Latin, and all will be said. It is not with a bit of recited Latin as with a bit of written Latin; the wind carries away the one, fire cannot always succeed in destroying the other."

"As far as I am concerned, I shall think no more about it, or the devil take me."

"Good!"

"I have something besides that to attend to."

"Your majesty prefers to be amused, eh?"

"Yes, my son," said Henry, rather vexed at the tone in which Chicot had uttered these few words; "yes, my majesty prefers to be amused."

"Pardon me, but perhaps I annoy your majesty?"

"Well! my son," said Henry, shrugging his shoulders, "I have already told you that it is not here as it is at the Louvre. Here we make love, war, and politics openly."

The glance of the king was so gentle, his smile so sweet, that Chicot felt himself emboldened.

"War and politics less than love, is it not, sire?" said he.

"Faith, yes, my dear friend, I admit it; this country is so beautiful, these wines of Languedoc so savory, these women of Navarre so beautiful!"

"Ah! sire," said Chicot, "you forget the queen, it seems to me; are the Navarre women more beautiful and more lovely than she? In that case I congratulate the women of Navarre."

"*Ventre Saint Gris!* You are right, Chicot, I forget that you are ambassador, that you represent King Henry III., that King Henry III. is brother to Madame Marguerite, and that consequently, before you, for propriety's sake, I ought to place Madame Marguerite above all women! But you must excuse my imprudence, Chicot; I am not used to ambassadors, my son."

At that moment the door of the cabinet opened, and D'Aubiac announced in a loud voice:

"Monsieur the Spanish Ambassador."

Chicot made a spring from his chair which brought a smile to the king's face.

"Faith," said Henry, "here is an interruption which I did not expect. What the devil is the Spanish ambassador coming here for?"

"Yes," repeated Chicot, "what the devil is he coming here for?"

"We shall see," said Henry; "perhaps our Spanish neighbor has some contest concerning the frontier to discuss with me."

"I will retire," said Chicot, humbly. "It is no doubt some real ambassador whom his majesty Philip II. has sent you, while as to me" —

"The French ambassador give way to the Spanish, and in Navarre! *Ventre Saint Gris!* that cannot be. Open this library, Chicot, and enter."

"But from there I shall hear everything in spite of myself, sire."

"And you shall hear, by Heaven! What difference does it make? I have nothing to hide. By the way, you have nothing further to tell me from the King your master, Monsieur l'Ambassadeur?"

"No, sire, absolutely nothing."

"Very well, then you have nothing further to do except to see and hear, as all the ambassadors on earth do; you will therefore be finely fixed in this library to fulfil your duty.

See with all your eyes and hear with all your ears, my dear Chicot."

Then he added:

"D'Aubiac, tell my captain of the guards to admit the Spanish ambassador."

Chicot, hearing this order, hastened to enter the library, and carefully drew the figured tapestry.

A slow, measured footstep fell on the resounding floor; it was that of the ambassador of his majesty Philip II. When the preliminaries devoted to the details of etiquette were over, and when Chicot had been able to convince himself, from the depths of his hiding-place, that the Béarnais thoroughly understood how to give an audience:

"You may speak, monsieur," said the Béarnais.

Chicot opened two large ears. The interest was great for him.

"Sire," said the ambassador, "I bring the answer from his Catholic majesty."

"Good!" said Chicot. "If he brings the reply, there must have been a demand."

"On what subject?" demanded Henry.

"Concerning your overtures of last month, sire."

"Faith, I am very forgetful," said Henry. "Kindly recall to me what those overtures were, I beg you, Monsieur l'Ambassadeur."

"Regarding the encroachments of the Lorraine princes in France."

"Yes, and especially in regard to those of my friend De Guise. Very good! I remember now. Continue, monsieur, continue."

"Sire," said the Spaniard, "the king my master, although urged to sign a treaty of alliance with Lorraine, has regarded an alliance with Navarre as more loyal, and, to speak frankly, more advantageous."

"Yes, to speak frankly," said Henry.

"I will be frank with your majesty, sire, for I know the intentions of the king my master in regard to your majesty."

"And I, may I know them?"

"Sire, the king my master has nothing to refuse to Navarre.

Chicot pressed his ear to the tapestry, and bit the end of his finger to make sure that he was not asleep.

"If they will refuse me nothing," said Henry, "let us see what I may demand."

"Whatever pleases your majesty, sire."

"The devil!"

"Speak openly and frankly, then."

"*Ventre Saint Gris!* everything, that is embarrassing!"

"His majesty the King of Spain wishes to put his new ally at ease; the proposition which I am about to make to your majesty will prove it."

"I am listening," said Henry.

"The King of France treats the Queen of Navarre as a sworn enemy; he repudiates her as sister from the moment he covers her with opprobium, that is certain. The insults of the King of France, and I ask pardon of your majesty for broaching this very delicate subject" —

"Broach it, broach it."

"The insults of the King of France are public; notoriety has consecrated them."

Henry made a movement of denial.

"There is notoriety," continued the Spaniard, "since we are informed; I therefore repeat, sire, the King of France repudiates Madame Marguerite for his sister, since he tried to insult her by having her litter stopped publicly, and by having her searched by a captain of the guards."

"Well! Monsieur l'Ambassadeur, to what are you coming?"

"Nothing is simpler, in consequence, for your majesty than to repudiate for wife the woman whom her brother repudiates for sister."

Henry glanced towards the tapestry, behind which Chicot, with startled eyes, waited, trembling, for the result of so momentous a beginning.

"The queen repudiated," went on the ambassador, "the alliance between the King of Navarre and the King of Spain" —

Henry bowed.

"This alliance," continued the ambassador, "is wholly concluded, and in this way: the King of Spain gives the infanta, his daughter, to the King of Navarre, and his majesty himself marries Madame Catherine of Navarre, your majesty's sister."

A shiver of pride ran through the body of the Béarnais; a shiver of fear through the body of Chicot. The one saw rising on the horizon his fortune as radiant as the morning sun; the

other saw descending and dying the sceptre and the fortune of the Valois.

The Spaniard, impassive and cold, saw nothing except the instructions of his master. For an instant there was a profound silence; then the King of Navarre went on:

"The proposition, monsieur, is magnificent, and covers me with honor."

"His majesty," the proud negotiator, who counted on an enthusiastic acceptance, hastened to say, "his majesty the King of Spain proposes to submit to your majesty but one condition."

"Ah! a condition," said Henry, "that is only fair; let us hear the condition."

"In aiding your majesty against the Lorraine princes, that is, in opening the way to the throne to your majesty, my master desires to facilitate by your alliance a means of keeping Flanders, at which my lord the Duke of Anjou is biting with all his teeth. Your majesty well knows that this is a great preference given to you by my master over the Lorraine princes, since the De Guises, his natural allies as Catholic princes, alone make a party against Monsieur le Duc d'Anjou in Flanders. But this is the condition, the only one; it is reasonable and easy: his majesty the King of Spain will ally himself with you by a double marriage, he will aid you to" — the ambassador paused an instant for the proper word — "to succeed the King of France, and you will guarantee Flanders to him. I may now, therefore, knowing the wisdom of your majesty, regard my negotiation as happily concluded."

A silence, still more profound than the former, succeeded these words, in order no doubt to let come in all its power the answer with which the exterminating angel was expecting to strike France or Spain.

Henry of Navarre took three or four steps in his cabinet.

"So, monsieur," said he, finally, "that is the answer which you are charged to bring me?"

"Yes, sire."

"Nothing more?"

"Nothing more."

"Well!" said Henry, "I refuse the offer of his majesty the King of Spain."

"You refuse the hand of the infanta?" cried the Spaniard, with a pang like that which is caused by the pain of a wound one does not expect.

"A very great honor," replied Henry, raising his head, "but which I cannot believe greater than that of having married a daughter of France."

"Yes, but this first alliance brought you near the tomb, sire; the second will bring you near the throne."

"Precious, incomparable fortune, monsieur, I know, but one which I would never buy with the blood and the honor of my future subjects. What! monsieur, should I draw the sword against the King of France, my brother-in-law, for the Spanish stranger? What! should I stop the standard of France on its road to glory, to let the towers of Castile and the lions of Leon finish the work which it has begun? What! should I have brothers killed by brothers; and lead the stranger into my country? Monsieur, listen well to this: I asked of my neighbor the King of Spain for aid against the De Guises, who are factionists greedy for my inheritance, — but not against the Duc d'Anjou, my brother-in-law; not against Henry III., my friend; not against my wife, the sister of my King. You will aid the De Guises, you say, you will lend them your support? Do so; I will hurl at you all the Protestants of Germany and France. The King of Spain wishes to reconquer Flanders, which is slipping from him; let him do as his father Charles V. did; let him demand passage from the King of France to go and reclaim his title of first citizen of Ghent, and King Henry III., I will be his guarantee, will give him a passage as loyal as did King Francis I. 'I desire the throne of France,' says his Catholic majesty. It is possible; but I do not need him to help me win it; I will take it entirely by myself, if it is vacant, and that in spite of every majesty in the world. Adieu, then, adieu, monsieur! say to my brother Philip that I am very grateful to him for his offers. But I should be mortally offended with him, if in making them he had thought me for a single instant capable of accepting them. Adieu, monsieur."

The ambassador stood petrified; at last he stammered:

"Take care, sire, the good understanding between two neighbors is undone by a wrong word."

"Monsieur l'Ambassadeur," said Henry, "know this: the King of Navarre or King of nothing, is all one to me. My crown is so light that I should not even feel it fall if it slipped from my brow; but, just at present, I am thinking of keeping it, you may be sure. Adieu once more, monsieur; say to the

king your master that I have ambitions greater than those of which he has given me a glimpse. Adieu!"

And the Béarnais, again becoming, not himself, but the man he was supposed to be, after having for an instant let himself be dominated by the warmth of his heroism, the Béarnais smilingly and courteously conducted the ambassador to the threshold of his cabinet.

CHAPTER L.

THE POOR OF THE KING OF NAVARRE.

Chicot was plunged in so profound a surprise that, when Henry was alone, he did not think of leaving the library. The Béarnais raised the tapestry and touched him on the shoulder.

"Well, Maître Chicot," said he, "how do you think I got out of it?"

"Wonderfully, sire," replied Chicot, still amazed. "But truly, for a king who does not often receive ambassadors, it seems that when you do receive them you receive them well."

"Yet it is my brother Henry to whom I owe these ambassadors."

"How so, sire?"

"Yes; if he were not constantly persecuting his poor sister, others would not think of persecuting her. Do you suppose that if the King of Spain had not known of the public insult offered to the Queen of Navarre, when a captain of the guards searched her litter, do you suppose that he would propose that I should repudiate her?"

"I see, with pleasure, sire," replied Chicot, "that all their attempts will be useless, and that nothing will destroy the pleasant harmony which exists between you and the queen."

"Well! my friend, the interest they take in embroiling us is very evident."

"I confess to you, sire, that I am not as penetrating as you imagine."

"No doubt all that my brother Henry desires is that I should repudiate his sister."

"How so? Explain matters to me, I beg you. The deuce! I did not think I was coming to such a good school."

"You know that they have forgotten to pay me my wife's dowry, Chicot?"

"No, I did not know it, sire, but I suspected it."

"That this dowry consisted of three hundred thousand crowns of gold?"

"A pretty sum."

"And of several towns as security, among them that of Cahors."

"A pretty city, by Heaven!"

"I have put in a claim, not for my three hundred thousand crowns of gold, — poor as I am, I claim to be richer than the King of France, — but Cahors."

"Ah! you have claimed Cahors, sire? *Ventre de biche!* you have done well, and in your place I should have done the same."

"And that is why," said the Béarnais, with his shrewd smile, "that is why — you understand now?"

"No, the devil take me!"

"That is why they wish to make trouble between me and my wife, so that I will repudiate her. No wife, you understand, Chicot, no dowry, consequently no three hundred thousand crowns, no cities, and especially no Cahors. It is one of the several ways of eluding his promise, and my brother of Valois is very clever in this kind of snare."

"But you would greatly like to have this town, would you not, sire?" said Chicot.

"No doubt, for after all, what is my kingdom of Béarn? — a poor little principality which the avarice of my brother-in-law and mother-in-law has cut off to such a degree that the title of king which is attached to it has become a title of ridicule."

"Yes, while Cahors added to this principality" —

"Cahors would be my boulevard, the safeguard of my religion."

"Well! my dear sire, make up your mind to the loss of Cahors; for whether you quarrel with Madame Marguerite or not, the King of France will never give it back to you unless you take it."

"Oh!" cried Henry, "I would readily take it, if it were not so strong, and especially if I did not hate war."

"Cahors is impregnable, sire," said Chicot.

Henry armed his face with impenetrable innocence.

"Oh! impregnable, impregnable," said he; "but if I only had an army — which I have not."

"Listen, sire," said Chicot, "we are not here to say sweet things to each other. Between Gascons, you know, we speak frankly. To take Cahors, where Monsieur de Vesin is, one must be a Hannibal or a Cæsar, and your majesty"—

"Well, my majesty?" said Henry, with his cunning smile.

"Your majesty has said you do not like war."

Henry sighed; a flash of light illumined his eye full of melancholy; but at once restraining this involuntary movement, he smoothed his brown beard with his hand tanned by the sun.

"Never have I drawn a sword, it is true; never shall I draw one. I am a straw king, and a man of peace; but, Chicot, by a singular contrast, I like to talk about matters of war. It is in my blood. Saint Louis, my ancestor, had this good fortune, that, although pious by education and gentle by nature, he became at times a fierce tilter with the lance, and a valiant swordsman. Let us speak, if you will, Chicot, of Monsieur Vesin, who is a Cæsar and a Hannibal."

"Sire, pardon me," said Chicot, "if I have not only wounded you, but troubled you. I spoke to you of Monsieur de Vesin merely to extinguish every trace of foolish ardor which youth and ignorance of affairs might arouse in your heart. Cahors, you see, is so well defended, and so carefully guarded, because it is the key to the south."

"Alas!" said Henry, sighing more deeply, "I well know it."

"It is," continued Chicot, "territorial richness joined to security of habitation. To have Cahors is to possess granaries, cellars, strong boxes, barns, lodgings, and connections; to possess Cahors is to have everything for one's self; not to possess Cahors is to have everything against one."

"Ah! *Ventre Saint Gris!*" murmured the King of Navarre; "that is why I was so anxious to possess Cahors that I told my poor mother to make it one of the conditions *sine quâ non* of my marriage. Ha! here I am speaking Latin. Cahors, then, was the dowry of my wife; they promised it to me, they owe it to me."

"Sire, to owe and to pay" — began Chicot.

"You are right; to owe and to pay are two very different things, my friend; so that your opinion is that they will not pay me?"

"I am afraid not."

"The devil!" said Henry.

"And frankly" — continued Chicot.

"Well?"

"Frankly, they would be right, sire."

"They would be right — how so, my friend?"

"Because you did not know how to carry out your position as king, the husband of a daughter of France, because you did not know how to have your dowry paid first and your cities delivered afterwards."

"Wretch!" said Henry, smiling bitterly, "you no longer remember the tocsin of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois, then? It seems to me that a man whom they want to kill the very night of his wedding does not think as much about his dowry as about his life."

"Good!" said Chicot; "but afterwards?"

"Afterwards?" demanded Henry.

"Yes; we have had peace, it seems to me. Well, we should have profited by this peace to act; we should have — excuse me, sire — we should, instead of making love, have negotiated. It is less amusing, I well know, but more profitable. I tell you this, truly, sire, as much for the King my master as for you. If Henry of France had in Henry of Navarre a strong ally, Henry of France would be stronger than every one else, and supposing that Catholics and Protestants could join together in one political interest, free to discuss their religious interests afterwards; Catholics and Protestants, that is, the two Henrys, would by themselves make the human race tremble."

"Oh! I," said Henry, with humility, "I do not aspire to make any one tremble, and provided that I do not tremble myself — But come, Chicot, let us speak no more of these things which trouble my mind; I have not Cahors, well! I will get along without it."

"That is hard, my king."

"What can you expect, since you yourself think that Henry will never give me this city?"

"I think so, sire; I am sure of it, and for three reasons."

"Tell them to me, Chicot."

"Willingly. The first is that Cahors is a city of great produce; that the King of France would rather keep it for himself than give it to any one."

"That is not exactly honest, Chicot."

"It is royal, sire."

"Ah! it is royal to take what one likes?"

"Yes, that is called taking the lion's share, and the lion is the king of beasts."

"I will remember what you tell me, my good Chicot, if ever I am king. Your second reason, my son?"

"This is it: Madame Catharine" —

"She still mingles in politics, my good mother Catharine?" interrupted Henry.

"Still; Madame Catharine would rather see her daughter in Paris than at Nérac; with her, rather than with you."

"You think so? Yet she does not love her daughter madly, this Madame Catharine."

"No, but Madame Marguerite serves you as a hostage, sire."

"You are saturated with ingenuity, Chicot. The devil take me if I should ever have thought of that; but indeed you may be right; yes, yes, a daughter of France, if need be, is a hostage. Well?"

"Well! sire, by lessening resources one lessens the pleasure of a sojourn. Nérac is a very pleasant city which has a charming park and paths such as exist nowhere else; but Madame Marguerite, deprived of resources, will tire of Nérac and will regret the Louvre."

"I prefer your first reason, Chicot," said Henry, shaking his head.

"Then I will tell you the third. Between the Duc d'Anjou, who is trying to make a throne for himself and who is stirring up Flanders, between the De Guises, who would fashion a crown for themselves, and who are stirring up France; between his majesty the King of Spain, who would try a universal monarchy, and who stirs up the world, you, prince of Navarre, are the balance, and maintain a certain equilibrium."

"Indeed! I, without weight?"

"Exactly. See the Swiss republic. Become powerful, that is heavy, and you will turn the scale. You will no longer be a counter-balance, you will be a weight."

"Oh! I like that reason very much, Chicot, and it is perfectly well deduced. You are a veritable scholar, Chicot."

"Faith, sire, I am what I am," said Chicot, flattered be it

what it might, by the compliment, and letting himself fall a prey to the royal good-nature to which he was not accustomed.

"Such, then, is the explanation of my position?" said Henry.

"Complete, sire."

"And I who saw nothing of all that, Chicot, I who was always hoping, you understand?"

"Well, sire, if I have advice to give you, it is to cease hoping, on the contrary!"

"Then, Chicot, I will do to this debt of the King of France that which I do to those of my farmers who cannot pay their rent; I put a 'p' by the side of their names."

"Which means, paid'?"

"Exactly."

"Put two 'p's', sire, and heave a sigh."

Henry sighed.

"I will do so, Chicot," said he. "For the rest, my friend, you see that one can live in Béarn, and that I have no actual need of Cahors."

"I see that, and, as I supposed, you are a wise prince, a philosophical king — But what is that noise?"

"Noise? where?"

"In the court, it seems to me."

"Look out of the window, my friend, look."

Chicot approached the window.

"Sire," said he, "there are a dozen shabbily dressed men below."

"Ah! those are my poor," said the King of Navarre, rising.

"Your majesty has his poor?"

"Without doubt. Does not God recommend charity? Although not a Catholic, Chicot, I am none the less a Christian."

"Bravo! sire."

"Come, Chicot, let us go down. We will give the alms together; then we will come up again for supper."

"Sire, I follow you."

"Take that purse which is on the small table, near my sword; do you see it?"

"I have it, sire."

"Good!"

Then they descended; night had fallen. The king seemed careworn and anxious.

Chicot looked at him and was sorry for this preoccupation.

"Where the devil did I get the idea," said he to himself, "of coming and talking politics to this good prince? I have made him sick at heart, truly, silly rascal that I am!"

Having once reached the court, Henry of Navarre approached the group of beggars who had been pointed out by Chicot.

There were in fact a dozen men of various heights, features, and costumes; men whom an ordinary observer would have taken, from their voice, their step, their gestures, for Bohemians, strangers, stray passers-by, but whom a clever observer would have recognized as distinguished gentlemen.

Henry took the purse from the hands of Chicot and made a sign.

All the beggars seemed to understand this sign perfectly. They approached and saluted him, each in turn with an air of humility which did not exclude a glance full of intelligence and audacity, bestowed on the king alone, as though to say to him:

"Under this covering our heart burns."

Henry replied by a nod of the head; then putting his thumb and first finger into the purse which Chicot held open, he took out a piece of money.

"Ah!" said Chicot, "you know that that is gold, sire?"

"Yes, my friend, I know it."

"The deuce! you are rich."

"Do you not see, my friend," said Henry, with a smile, "that every one of these gold pieces serves me as two? I am poor, on the contrary, Chicot, and I am forced to cut my pistoles in two in order to lead a sober life."

"That is true," said Chicot, with increasing surprise, "the pieces are halves."

"Oh! I am like my brother of France, who amuses himself by cutting out pictures; I have my pastimes. I amuse myself in my idle moments by cutting my ducats. A poor and honest Béarnais is as industrious as a Jew."

"It is all one to me, sire," said Chicot, shaking his head, for he suspected some new mystery hidden underneath it; "it is all one, but it is a singular way of giving alms."

"You would do otherwise?"

"Yes, in faith; instead of taking the trouble of cutting each piece I would give it uncut, saying: 'This is for two!'"

"They would quarrel, my dear fellow, and I should cause trouble in trying to do good."

"Indeed!" murmured Chicot, summing up in this word, which is the quintessence of all philosophies, his opposition to the strange ideas of the king.

Then Henry took a half piece of gold from his purse, and, standing in front of the first beggar with the calm, gentle manner which was part of his usual bearing, he looked at the man without speaking, but not without questioning him by a glance.

"Agen," said the latter, bowing.

"How many?" asked the king.

"Five hundred.

"Cahors."

And he handed him the coin, and took another from his purse.

The beggar bowed even lower than the first time and went away.

He was followed by another, who saluted with humility.

"Auch," said he, bowing.

"How many?"

"Three hundred and fifty."

"Cahors."

And he gave him the second piece, and took another from his purse.

This man disappeared like the first. A third approached, and bowed.

"Narbonne," said he.

"How many?"

"Eight hundred."

"Cahors."

And he gave him the third piece, and took another from his purse.

"Montauban," said a fourth.

"How many?"

"Six hundred."

"Cahors."

At length all approached and bowed, pronounced a name, received the strange alms, and gave a number, the total of which amounted to eight thousand.

To each of them Henry replied "Cahors," without once varying the tone of his voice in pronouncing the word. The distribution over, there were no more half pieces in the purse and no more beggars in the court.

"There," said Henry.

"That is all, sire?"

"Yes, I have finished."

Chicot pulled the king by the sleeve.

"Sire!" said he.

"Well?"

"Is it permitted me to be inquisitive?"

"Why not? Curiosity is a natural thing."

"What did those beggars say to you, and what the devil did you answer them?"

Henry smiled.

"In truth, everything is a mystery here."

"You find it so?"

"Yes, I have never seen alms given in that way."

"It is the custom at Nérac, my dear Chicot. You know the proverb: 'Every town has its custom.'"

"A singular custom, sire."

"No, the devil take me! nothing is simpler; all these men you see roam about the country to beg alms; but they are all from different towns."

"And then, sire?"

"Well! in order that I may not always give to the same, they tell me the name of their town; in this way, you see, my dear Chicot, I can distribute my benefits equally, and I am of use to all the poor wretches of every town in my kingdom."

"That is very well, sire, in regard to the name of the town which they pronounce; but why do you answer 'Cahors' to all?"

"Ah!" replied Henry, with an air of surprise perfectly feigned; "I answered 'Cahors' to them?"

"By Heaven!"

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"Well, you see, since we spoke of Cahors, I had this word still in my mind. It is with that as with all things which we cannot have and which we greatly desire; we think of them and speak of them in thinking of them."

"Ah!" said Chicot, looking with mistrust in the direction in which the beggars had disappeared, "it is very much less clear than I would wish, sire; there is still, besides that"—

"What! There is still something else?"

"There is the number which each one pronounced, and

which, added together, makes a total of more than eight thousand."

"Oh! as to that number, Chicot, I am like you, I do not understand, unless the beggars are, as you know, divided into corporations, and that they stated the number of members in each of these corporations, which seems probable to me."

"Sire! sire!"

"Come to supper, my friend; nothing sharpens the intellect, in my opinion, as much as eating and drinking. We will try at table, and you shall see that if my ducats are cut in two, my bottles are full."

The king whistled for a page and ordered supper.

Then passing his arm familiarly through Chicot's he returned to his cabinet, where supper was served.

As he passed before the apartments of the queen, he glanced at the windows, but saw no light.

"Page," said he, "is not her majesty the queen in her rooms?"

"Her majesty," replied the page, "has gone to see Mademoiselle de Montmorency, who is said to be very ill."

"Ah! poor Fosseuse," said Henry, "it is true the queen has a kind heart. Come to supper, Chicot, come!"

CHAPTER LI.

THE REAL MISTRESS OF THE KING OF NAVARRE.

The supper was one of the liveliest. Henry seemed to have nothing further on his mind or in his heart, and when he was in this mood the Béarnais was an excellent host.

As to Chicot, he concealed as well as he could the germs of anxiety which had seized him at the coming of the Spanish ambassador, which had followed him to the court, which had increased at the distribution of gold to the beggars, and which had not left him since.

Henry had wanted his companion Chicot to sup with him alone; at the court of King Henry he had always felt a great weakness for Chicot, one of those weaknesses which men of wit have for men of wit; and Chicot, on his side, except for the embassy from Spain, the beggars with their passwords

and the cut pieces of gold, Chicot felt a great sympathy for the King of Navarre.

Seeing the king change the wine, and act in every respect like a good table companion, Chicot resolved to be somewhat careful, so as to let none of the flashes of wit escape which the freedom of the repast and the heat of the wines might inspire in the Béarnais.

Henry drank hard, and he had a way of leading his guests on, which allowed Chicot to remain behind scarcely more than one glass to his host's three.

But Monsieur Chicot's head was a head of iron, as we know. As to Henry of Navarre, all the wines were wines of the country, he said, and he drank them like whey.

All this was seasoned with many compliments, which the two guests exchanged with each other.

"How I envy you," said Chicot to the king, "and how pleasant your court, and how free from care your life, sire; what happy faces I see in this good household, and what wealth in this beautiful land of Gascony!"

"If my wife were here, my dear Chicot, I would not tell you what I am going to say; but in her absence I can confess to you that the best part of my life is that which you do not see."

"Ah! sire, they do indeed say some abusive things about your majesty."

Henry threw himself back in his chair, and caressed his beard with a laugh.

"Yes, yes, don't they?" said he; "they pretend that I reign much more over my fair subjects than over my men subjects."

"It is the truth, sire, and yet this surprises me."

"In what respect, my friend?"

"In that you have a great deal of the restless spirit which makes great kings, sire."

"Ah! Chicot, you are mistaken," said Henry; "I am more lazy than restless, and my whole life is proof of this. If I am in love, it is always with the one nearest to me; if it is wine that I choose, it is always the nearest bottle. Your health, Chicot!"

"Sire, you do me honor," replied Chicot, emptying his glass to the last drop; for the king was watching him with that shrewd look which seemed to penetrate to the depths of his thoughts.

"Therefore," continued the king, raising his eyes to Heaven, "what quarrels in my household, comrade!"

"Yes, I understand, all the queen's maids of honor adore you, sire!"

"They are my neighbors, Chicot."

"Well! well! sire, it results from this axiom that if you lived at Saint Denis, instead of Nérac, the King could not live as tranquilly as he does."

Henry became gloomy.

"The King! what are you saying, Chicot?" said Henry of Navarre; "the King! Do you imagine that I am a De Guise? I desire Cahors, it is true; but because Cahors is at my gate; my system again, Chicot. I have my ambition, but while sitting down; once risen, I am no longer desirous of anything."

"*Ventre de biche!* sire," replied Chicot, "this ambition for things within reach of your hand greatly resembles that of Cæsar Borgia, who took a kingdom town by town, saying that Italy was an artichoke which must be eaten leaf by leaf."

"This Cæsar Borgia was not such a bad politician, it seems to me, my friend," said Henry.

"No, but he was a very dangerous neighbor, and a very wicked brother."

"Ah! but would you compare me to a son of a pope, I, the chief of the Huguenots? One moment, Monsieur l'Ambassadeur."

"Sire, I compare you to no one."

"For what reason?"

"For the reason that I think he would be mistaken who would compare you to any other than yourself. You are ambitious, sire."

"What a queer idea!" said the Béarnais; "here is a man who, by every means, wants to force me to desire something."

"God forbid! sire; quite the contrary. I hope with all my heart that your majesty will want nothing."

"Wait, Chicot," said the king, "nothing calls you back to Paris, does it?"

"Nothing, sire."

"You will spend a few days with me, then?"

"If your majesty does me the honor to desire my company, I ask nothing better than to give you a week."

"A week! well! so be it, comrade; in a week you will know me like a brother. Let us drink, Chicot."

"Sire, I am no longer thirsty," said Chicot, who was beginning to give up the idea he had had at first of making the king drunk.

"Then I will leave you, comrade," said Henry; "a man should not remain at table when he no longer has anything to do there. Let us drink, I tell you."

"Why?"

"To sleep the better. This light wine of the country produces a very gentle sleep. Do you like hunting, Chicot?"

"Not very much, sire; do you?"

"I have been passionately devoted to it ever since my stay at the court of King Charles IX."

"Why did your majesty do me the honor of asking if I liked hunting?" demanded Chicot.

"Because I am going to hunt to-morrow, and I counted on taking you with me."

"Sire, that would be too much honor, but" —

"Oh, comrade, be easy, this chase is done to make glad the eyes and the heart of every swordsman. I am a good hunter, Chicot, and I want you to see me to my best advantage, the devil! you want to know me, you say?"

"*Ventre de biche!* sire, it is one of my greatest desires, I confess."

"Well! it is a side on which you have not yet studied me."

"Sire, I will do everything which will please the king."

"Good! then the affair is settled! Ah! here is a page; we are interrupted."

"Some business of importance, sire."

"Business! for me, when I am at table! It is astonishing, but this dear Chicot still believes himself at the court of France. Chicot, my friend, know one thing; that at Nérac" —

"Well! sire?"

"When one has supped well, one goes to bed."

"But this page?"

"Well! but may not this page announce something besides business?"

"Ah! I understand, sire, and I will go to bed."

Chicot arose; the king did the same, and took his guest's arm.

This haste to send him away seemed suspicious to Chicot, to whom everything, for that matter, since the announcement of the Spanish ambassador, had begun to look suspicious. He resolved, therefore, not to leave the cabinet until as late as possible.

"Oh! oh!" said he, staggering; "that is strange, sire."

The Béarnais smiled.

"What is strange, my friend?"

"*Ventre de biche!* my head is whirling round. As long as I was seated, it went well; but now that I have risen, whew!"

"Bah!" said Henry; "we did nothing but taste the wine."

"Good! tasted, sire; you call that tasting? Bravo! Ah! you are a fierce drinker, and I render you homage, as to my sovereign lord! Good! You call that tasting, do you?"

"Chicot, my friend," said the Béarnais, trying to discover, by one of those subtle glances which belonged to him, if Chicot was really drunk or only pretending to be; "Chicot, my friend, I think the thing which you would best do now is to go to bed."

"Yes, sire; good-night, sire."

"Good night, Chicot, until to-morrow."

"Yes, sire, until to-morrow! And your majesty is right; that which Chicot would better do is to go to bed. Good-night, sire!"

And Chicot lay down on the floor.

On seeing this resolution of his guest, Henry glanced at the door.

Rapid as was this glance, Chicot caught it on the wing. Henry approached Chicot.

"You are so drunk, my poor Chicot, that you do not notice one thing."

"What?"

"You are taking the matting of my cabinet for your bed."

"Chicot is a warrior; Chicot does not notice such a little thing."

"Then you do not perceive two things?"

"Ah! ah! and what is the second?"

"That I am expecting some one."

"For supper? well! let us sup."

And Chicot made a fruitless effort to rise.

"*Ventre Saint Gris!*" cried Henry, "how suddenly you

become drunk, my friend! Get up, by Heaven! you see well enough that she is growing impatient."

"She!" said Chicot; "what she?"

"Well! by Heaven! the woman I am expecting, and who is waiting at the door, there" —

"A woman! Well! why did you not say so, Henriquet? Ah! pardon," said Chicot, "I thought — I thought I was speaking to the King of France. He has spoiled me, you see, this good Henriquet. Why did you not say so, sire? I will go away."

"Good! you are a true gentleman, Chicot. There, there, get up and go away, for I have a fine night to spend, do you hear? a whole night."

Chicot rose and stumbled to the door.

"Adieu, dear friend, adieu; sleep well."

"And you, sire" —

"Hush!"

"Yes, yes, hush!"

And he opened the door.

"You will find the page in the corridor, and he will show you your room. Go, now."

"Thanks, sire."

And Chicot went out, having bowed as low as a drunken man could.

But as soon as the door closed behind him every trace of drinking disappeared; he took three steps forward, and returning suddenly, he put his eye to the wide keyhole.

Henry was already engaged in opening the door to the unknown lady whom Chicot, curious like all ambassadors, wanted to know, no matter by what means. Instead of a woman it was a man who entered.

And when this man had removed his hat, Chicot recognized the noble and serious face of Duplessis Mornay, the stern and watchful adviser of Henry of Navarre.

"Ah! the devil!" said Chicot; "there is one who will surprise our lover and trouble him, surely, more than I myself did."

But Henry's face, at sight of the man, expressed nothing but joy; he grasped the hands of the newcomer, pushed back the table with scorn, and made Mornay sit down near him with all the ardor that a lover would use in approaching his mistress.

He seemed eager to hear the first words which the adviser

was to utter; but suddenly, and before Mornay had spoken, he arose, and making a sign to him to wait, he went to the door and drew the bolts with a circumspection which gave Chicot much to think about.

Then he fixed his eager eyes on some charts, plans, and letters which the minister placed successively under his eyes.

The king lighted other candles, and began to write and to mark the geographical charts.

"Oh! oh!" said Chicot, "this is the fine night of the King of Navarre. *Ventre de biche!* if they all resemble this one Henry of Valois may well pass some bad ones."

At that moment he heard a step behind him; it was the page who guarded the corridor, and who was waiting there by order of the king.

In the fear of being suprised if he remained listening longer, Chicot resumed his full height and asked his room of the boy. Besides, he had nothing further to fear; the arrival of Duplessis had told him everything.

"Come with me, if you please, monsieur," said D'Aubiac, "I am ordered to conduct you to your apartment."

And he led Chicot to the second floor, where his room had been prepared.

For Chicot there was no further doubt; he knew half of the letters which composed the enigma called the King of Navarre. So, instead of going to sleep, he seated himself sad and pensive on his bed, while the moon, descending on the sharp angles of the roof, threw, as from the top of a silver ewer, its azure light over river and meadow.

"Well, well," said Chicot, sadly, "Henry is a true king: Henry conspires. All this palace, his park, the town which surrounds it, the province which surrounds the town, all is a hot-bed of conspiracy; all the women make love, but political love; all the men create a hope for the future. Henry is crafty; his intelligence borders on genius; he has an understanding with Spain, the country of deceit. Who knows if his noble reply to the ambassador is not the opposite of what he thinks, and even if he did not warn this ambassador by a wink of the eye, or some other tacit agreement, which I, hidden as I was, could not know. Henry talks with spies; he pays or has them paid by some agent; these beggars were neither more nor less than gentlemen disguised. Their gold pieces so artistically cut in two are pledges of recognition, passwords,

material or palpable. Henry pretends to be madly in love, and while he is supposed to be engaged in making love, he is spending his nights working with Mornay, who never sleeps, and who knows not love. That is what I had to see and I have seen it. Queen Marguerite has lovers, the king is aware of this; he knows them and tolerates them, because he still has need of them and of her, perhaps of all at once. Not being a warrior, he must clearly have captains, and not having a great deal of money, he is forced to let them choose the money which best suits them. Henry of Valois told me he did not sleep. *Ventre de biche!* he does well not to sleep. Besides, fortunately, this perfidious Henry is a good gentleman, to whom the Lord, in giving a genius for intrigue, forgot to give the strength of the initiative. Henry, they say, is afraid of the sound of muskets, and when, still a boy, he was led to battle, they agree in telling that he could not remain in the saddle longer than a quarter of an hour. Fortunately," repeated Chicot; "for in the times in which we live, if, with intrigue, such a man were a soldier, this man would be the king of the world. There is indeed a De Guise; the latter possesses both kinds of strength: he has the arm and the intrigue, but he has the disadvantage of being known to be brave and clever, while no one distrusts the Béarnais. I alone have guessed him."

And Chicot rubbed his hands.

"Well!" he continued; "having guessed him, I have nothing more to do here; therefore, while he works or sleeps, I will calmly and quietly leave the town. There are not many ambassadors, I believe, who can boast of having accomplished their entire mission in one day, but I have done it. Therefore I will leave Nérac; and once out of Nérac, I will gallop to France."

He spoke thus, and began putting on his spurs, which he had taken off when he presented himself before the king.

CHAPTER LII.

CONCERNING THE ASTONISHMENT WHICH CHICOT FELT AT BEING SO POPULAR IN THE TOWN OF NÉRAC.

Chicot, having resolved to leave the court of the King of Navarre incognito, began to make up his little parcel for travelling.

He simplified it as much as possible, his idea being that one goes faster the less one weighs.

Assuredly, his sword was the heaviest part of the baggage he carried.

"Let us see," said Chicot to himself, as he tied his bundle, "how much time I need to take to the King news of what I have seen, and consequently of what I fear? Two days to reach a town from which a good governor will despatch couriers at full speed. Let this town, for instance, be Cahors, Cahors of which the King of Navarre speaks so much, and which so deservedly occupies his thoughts. Once there I can rest, for, after all, the strength of man has but a certain limit; I will rest, therefore, at Cahors, and the horses shall run for me. So, Chicot, my friend, limbs, swiftness, and nerve. You thought you had accomplished your entire mission, simpleton, you have done but the half of it, and now set out once more!"

This said, Chicot extinguished the light, opened the door as softly as he could, and started out on tiptoe.

Chicot was a clever strategist. While following D'Aubiac he had thrown a glance to the right, a glance to the left, a glance before and behind and had recognized all the localities. An antechamber, a corridor, a staircase; then, at the foot of this staircase, the court. But Chicot had no sooner taken four steps in the antechamber than he ran against something which at once rose.

This something was a page lying on the rug outside of the room, and who, awakened, exclaimed:

"Well, good evening, Monsieur Chicot, good evening!"

Chicot recognized D'Aubiac.

"Well, good evening, Monsieur d'Aubiac," said he; "but step a little aside, if you please. I want to take a walk."

"Ah! but it is forbidden to walk in the château at night, Monsieur Chicot."

"Why so, if you please, Monsieur d'Aubiac?"

"Because the king fears robbers, and the queen gallants."

"The devil!"

"But it is only robbers and gallants who walk about at night instead of sleeping."

"Yet, dear Monsieur d'Aubiac," said Chicot, with his most winning smile, "I am neither the one nor the other. I am an ambassador, and a very weary ambassador from having talked Latin with the queen and supped with the king; for the queen is a great Latin scholar and the king a hard drinker; let me go out, therefore, my friend, for I have a great desire to walk."

"In the town, Monsieur Chicot?"

"Oh, no! in the gardens."

"The deuce! in the gardens? Monsieur Chicot, it is forbidden to walk there more than in the town."

"My little friend," said Chicot, "it is giving you a compliment to say you are very vigilant, indeed, for your age. You have nothing to occupy you?"

"No."

"You are neither gambler nor lover?"

"To gamble, one must have money, Monsieur Chicot; to be in love, one must have a mistress."

"Assuredly," said Chicot.

And he felt in his pocket.

The page watched what he was doing.

"Search your memory well, my dear friend," said he to him, "and I will wager that you will find in it some charming woman for whom I beg you to buy many ribbons and to give many violinists with this."

And Chicot slipped into the hand of the page ten pistoles which were not cut like those of the Béarnais.

"Come, then, Monsieur Chicot," said the page, "it is easy to see that you come from the court of France, you have manners to which one would not know how to refuse anything; leave your room, then, but be careful to make no noise."

Chicot did not wait to be told twice; he glided like a shadow into the corridor, and from the corridor to the stairway, but having reached the foot of the peristyle, he found an officer of the palace, sleeping on a chair.

This man barred the door by the very weight of his body; to try to pass would have been folly.

"Ah! little brigand of a page," murmured Chicot; "you knew that, and you did not warn me."

To add to his ill luck, the officer seemed to be sleeping very lightly; he moved with nervous starts, now an arm, now a limb; once, even, he raised his arm like a man ready to awaken.

Chicot looked about him to see if there were not some exit by which, thanks to his long legs and a solid fist, he could escape without going through the door. Finally he perceived what he wanted.

It was one of those so-called arched imposts, which had been left open, either to admit the air or because the King of Navarre, a not very careful proprietor, had not thought it necessary to renew the glass.

Chicot touched the wall with his fingers; he calculated, by feeling, each space included between the ledges, and used it to put his foot on, like the rounds of a ladder. At length he raised himself up — our readers know his agility and swiftness — without making more noise than a dry leaf would have made grazing the wall under the breath of an autumn wind.

But the impost was of unequal convexity, so much so that the curve was not the same as that of Chicot's abdomen and shoulders, although he had not much abdomen, and his shoulders, supple as those of a cat, seemed to dislocate and disappear into the flesh, in order to occupy less space.

The result was that when Chicot had passed his head and one shoulder over, and had taken his foot from the ledge of the wall, he found himself suspended between heaven and earth without being able to retreat or advance.

He then began a series of efforts, the first result of which was to tear his doublet and scratch his skin.

That which rendered his position more difficult was his sword, the handle of which would not move, thus making a hook on the inner side which held Chicot tight to the frame of the window.

Chicot collected all his strength, all his patience, and all his energy in order to unfasten the hook of his belt, but it was from this very hook that he hung; he had therefore to change the manœuvre: he succeeded in slipping his arm behind his back and drawing his sword from its sheath; once the sword drawn out, it was easier to find, thanks to his angular body, an interstice through which he pushed the handle; the sword

therefore fell first to the pavement, and Chicot, gliding through the opening like a snake, followed it, breaking his fall with his two hands. This whole struggle of the man against the iron jaws of the impost had not been accomplished without noise; so Chicot, upon rising, found himself face to face with a soldier.

"Ah! my God! Have you hurt yourself, Monsieur Chicot?" demanded the latter, presenting the end of his halberd as a means of support.

"Again!" thought Chicot.

Then thinking of the interest which this brave man had shown for him:

"No, my friend," said he, "not at all."

"That is very fortunate," said the soldier. "I defy any one, whoever he may be, to accomplish such a feat without breaking his head; in truth, only you could have done it, Monsieur Chicot."

"But how the devil do you know my name?" asked Chicot, still endeavoring to pass.

"I know it because I saw you in the palace to-day, and because I asked: 'Who is that tall gentleman talking with the king?'

"'That is Monsieur Chicot,' they answered me. That is how I know it."

"They could not be more gallant," said Chicot; "but as I am in great haste, my friend, you will permit me" —

"What, Monsieur Chicot?"

"To leave you and go about my business."

"But we do not leave the palace at night; I have orders."

"You see very well that we do leave, since I have come out."

"That is a reason, I well know, but" —

"But?"

"You will go back, that is all, Monsieur Chicot."

"Ah! no."

"What! no?"

"Not that way, at least; the road is too rough."

"If I were an officer instead of a soldier I should ask you why you came out that way; but that is no concern of mine; what does concern me is that you must go back again. Return, therefore, Monsieur Chicot, I beg you."

And the soldier put into his words such an accent of persuasion that Chicot was touched. Consequently Chicot felt in his pocket, and drew out ten pistoles.

"You are too saving, my friend," said he, "not to understand that since I have reduced my clothes to their present state by taking this road, they would be much worse if I were to go back by it; I should then succeed in tearing them completely and I should have to go naked, which would be rather indecent in a court where there are so many young and pretty women, beginning with the queen; let me pass, therefore, my friend, to go to the tailor's."

And he put the ten pistoles into the man's hand.

"Pass quickly, then, Monsieur Chicot, pass quickly."

And the man pocketed the silver.

Chicot was in the street; he looked about to get his bearings. He had crossed the town to reach the palace; it was the opposite way he had to take now, since he must leave by the gate opposite the one by which he had entered. That was all. The night, clear and without clouds, was not favorable for a flight. Chicot regretted those good foggy nights of France, which, at that hour, would have made the streets of Paris so that one could pass within four feet of another without being seen; besides, on the pointed pavements of the town, his iron boots sounded like a horse's hoofs.

The unlucky ambassador had no more than turned the corner of the street before he met a patrolman.

He stopped of his own accord, knowing that he would appear suspicious by trying to hide or force his way.

"Well! good evening, Monsieur Chicot," said the chief of the patrol, saluting him with his sword, "do you want us to take you back to the palace? You look to me as though you were lost and were trying to find your way."

"Ah! so every one knows me here?" murmured Chicot. "By Heaven! that is strange."

Then aloud, and in the most careless manner he could assume:

"No, cornet," said he, "you are mistaken, I am not going to the palace."

"You are wrong, Monsieur Chicot," replied the officer, gravely.

"And why so, monsieur?"

"Because a very severe edict forbids the inhabitants of Nérac to go out at night, except from urgent necessity, without permission and without a lantern."

"Excuse me, monsieur," said Chicot, "but the edict cannot apply to me."

"And why not?"

"I am not an inhabitant of Nérac."

"Yes; but you are at Nérac. 'Inhabitant' does not mean living in; 'inhabitant' means staying in; and you will not deny that you are staying in Nérac, since I meet you in the streets of Nerac."

"You are logical, monsieur; unfortunately, I am in haste. Act a little in violation of your orders, then, and let me pass, I beg you."

"You will lose yourself, Monsieur Chicot; Nérac is a tortuous city; you will fall into some dirty hole; you need to be guided; allow three of my men to conduct you back to the palace."

"But I am not going to the palace, I tell you."

"Where are you going, then?"

"I cannot sleep at night, and so I walk. Nérac is a charming town, full of the unexpected, it seems to me; I want to see it, study it."

"They shall take you wherever you desire, Monsieur Chicot. Ho, there! three men!"

"I beseech you, monsieur, do not take away the picturesqueness of my walk. I like to go alone."

"You will be assassinated by robbers."

"I have my sword."

"Ah! that is true; I had not seen it. In that case you will be arrested by the provost for being armed."

Chicot saw that there were no means of getting out of it by subtleties; he took the officer aside.

"Come, monseiur," said he, "you are young and pleasing, you know that love is an imperious tyrant."

"No doubt, Monsieur Chicot, no doubt."

"Well, love is burning me up, cornet. I have a certain lady to visit."

"Where?"

"In a certain quarter."

"Young?"

"Twenty-three."

"Beautiful?"

"As the Loves themselves."

"I congratulate you, Monsieur Chicot."

"Good! you will let me pass, then?"

"Well! it is urgent, apparently."

"Urgent is the word, monsieur."

"Pass on, then."

"But alone, you mean? You know that I cannot compromise"—

"The idea! Pass on, Monsieur Chicot, pass on."

"You are a gallant man, cornet."

"Monsieur!"

"No, *ventre de biche!* it is a good trait. But come, how do you know me?"

"I saw you at the palace with the king."

"That is what small towns are!" thought Chicot; "if I were recognized like this in Paris, how many times should I have had holes in my skin instead of in my doublet!"

And he shook the hand of the young officer, who said to him:

"By the way, in what direction are you going?"

"Towards the Porte Agen."

"Be careful not to lose your way."

"Am I not on the road?"

"Yes, go straight ahead, and don't get into trouble; this is what I wish you."

"Thanks."

And Chicot set off, more quickly and more joyously than ever. He had not gone a hundred feet before he found himself face to face with the night watchman.

"By Heaven, what a well guarded town!" thought Chicot.

"No one can pass!" cried the provost in a voice of thunder.

"But, monsieur," objected Chicot, "I wish, however"—

"Ah, Monsieur Chicot! it is you; how do you happen to be walking in the streets such a cold night?" asked the magisterial officer.

"Ah! evidently it is a wager," thought Chicot, greatly troubled. And bowing, he made a movement to continue his way.

"Monsieur Chicot, take care," said the provost.

"Take care of what, Monsieur Magistrate?"

"You mistake the road; you are going towards the gates."

"Exactly."

"In that case I shall arrest you, Monsieur Chicot."

"No, Monsier Provost; plague it! you would perform a fine act!"

"But" —

"Approach, Monsieur Provost, so that your soldiers will not hear what we say."

The provost drew near.

"I am listening," said he.

"The king has given me a commission for the lieutenant of the Porte Agen."

"Ah! ah!" said the provost, with an air of surprise.

"That surprises you?"

"Yes."

"It ought not to astonish you, however, since you know me."

"I know you from having seen you at the palace with the king."

Chicot stamped his foot; impatience was beginning to take possession of him.

"That ought to suffice to prove to you that I have the confidence of his majesty."

"No doubt, no doubt; go on, and execute the king's commission, Monsieur Chicot, I will not arrest you."

"This is queer, but pleasant," thought Chicot; "I am stopped on the way, yet I still keep going. *Ventre de biche!* there is a gate — it must be that of Agen; in five minutes I shall be outside."

In short, he arrived at the gate, which was guarded by a sentinel who was walking back and forth, his musket on his shoulder.

"Pardon, my friend," said Chicot, "will you give orders for the gate to be opened for me?"

"I do not give orders, Monsieur Chicot," replied the sentinel, pleasantly, "since I am only a soldier."

"You know me, also!" cried Chicot, exasperated.

"I have that honor, Monsieur Chicot; I was this morning on guard at the palace; I saw you talking with the king."

"Well, my friend, since you know me, learn one thing."

"What?"

"That the king has given me a very important message for Agen; so just open the postern for me."

"I would do so with great pleasure, Monsieur Chicot, but I have no keys."

"Who has them?"

"The officer on duty."

Chicot sighed.

"And where is the officer on duty?" he asked.

"Oh! you need not trouble yourself on that account."

The man rang a bell, which awakened the sleeping officer.

"What is the matter?" asked the latter, putting his head out of his window.

"Lieutenant, here is a gentleman who wants the gate opened in order to pass through into the open country."

"Ah! Monsieur Chicot," cried the officer, "pardon, so sorry to keep you waiting; excuse me, I am at your service; I will come down."

Chicot bit his nails with growing anger.

"Shall I not find any one who does not know me? This Nérac is a lantern, then, and I am the light!"

The officer appeared at the door.

"Excuse me, Monsieur Chicot," said he, advancing in great haste, "I was asleep."

"Indeed, monsieur," said Chicot, "the night is made for that; would you be good enough to have the gate opened for me? I, myself, do not sleep, unfortunately. The king — you too, no doubt, are aware that the king knows me."

"I saw you to-day talking with his majesty at the palace."

"Just so," growled Chicot. "Well, so be it. If you saw me talking with the king, at least you did not hear me talking."

"No, Monsieur Chicot, I say just as it was."

"I too; now, the king in speaking with me, commanded me to go to-night to carry out a commission at Agen, and this gate is that of Agen, is it not?"

"Yes, Monsieur Chicot."

"It is closed?"

"As you see."

"Kindly have it opened for me, I beg you."

"Yes, indeed, Monsieur Chicot. Anthenas! Anthenas! unlock the gate for Monsieur Chicot, quick, quick, quick!"

Chicot opened wide his eyes and breathed like a diver who rises from the water after five minutes' immersion.

The gate creaked on its hinges, the gate of Paradise for poor Chicot, who saw beyond it all the delights of liberty.

He saluted the officer cordially, and walked towards the arch.

"Adieu," said he, "thanks!"

"Adieu, Monsieur Chicot, a pleasant journey!"

And Chicot took another step toward the gate.

"By the way, stupid that I am!" cried the officer, running after Chicot, and catching hold of him by the sleeve; "I forgot, dear Monsieur Chicot, to ask you for your pass."

"What! my pass?"

"Certainly; you are a warrior, Monsieur Chicot, and you know what a pass is, do you not? One does not leave a town like Nérac, you understand, without a pass from the king, especially when the king lives in it."

"And by whom should this pass be signed?"

"By the king himself. So, since it is the king who is sending you into the open country, he will not have forgotten to give you a pass."

"Ah! ah! do you doubt, then, that it is the king who is sending me?" said Chicot, his eyes on fire, for he saw himself on the point of being disappointed, and anger suggested to him the evil thought of killing the officer, the gatekeeper, and rushing through the open gate, at the risk of being pursued in his flight by a hundred musket-shots.

"I doubt nothing, Monsieur Chicot, especially the facts which you do me the honor to tell me, but reflect that if the king gave you this commission" —

"In person, monsieur, in person."

"All the more reason. His majesty knows, then, that you are going to leave" —

"*Ventre de biche!*" cried Chicot; "I should think he did know it."

"In that case I shall have a pass to deliver to-morrow morning to monsieur the governor of the place."

"And the governor of the place," demanded Chicot, "is" —

"Monsieur de Mornay, who does not joke with orders, Monsieur Chicot, — you ought to know that, — and who would have me shot, purely and simply, if I failed in mine."

Chicot was beginning to caress the handle of his sword with an evil smile, when turning round he perceived that the gate was barred by an outside patrol which would have prevented him from passing, even had he killed the lieutenant, the sentinel, and the gate-keeper.

"Well," said Chicot to himself, with a sigh, "it was well played. I am a fool, I have lost."

And he turned on his heels.

"Do you want us to conduct you back, Monsieur Chicot?" asked the officer.

"It is not worth while, thanks," replied Chicot.

Chicot retraced his steps, but he was not at the end of his martyrdom.

He met the provost, who said to him:

"So, Monsieur Chicot, you have already executed your commission? The deuce! you are quick at this business of yours!"

Farther on the patrol came upon him at the corner of the street, and cried out:

"Good evening, Monsieur Chicot. Well! that lady, you know — Are you pleased with Nérac, Monsieur Chicot?"

Finally the soldier of the peristyle, still on guard in the same place, fired his last broadside.

"By Heaven! Monsieur Chicot," said he to him, "the tailor has mended you rather poorly, and God forgive me, you are more torn even than when you started."

Chicot did not wish to risk being skinned like a hare by passing again by the impost; so he lay down in front of the door, and pretended to be asleep. By chance, or rather by charity, the door opened, and Chicot entered, abashed and humbled, into the palace.

His wild look touched the page, still at his post.

"Dear Monsieur Chicot," said the latter to him, "do you want me to give you the key to all this?"

"Give, serpent, give," murmured Chicot.

"Well! the king loves you so much that he intends to keep you."

"And you knew it, little brigand, and you did not warn me!"

"Oh, Monsieur Chicot, impossible, it was a state secret."

"But I paid you, rascal!"

"Oh! the secret was worth more than ten pistoles, you will admit, dear Monsieur Chicot."

Chicot entered his room again, and fell asleep in a rage.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE FIRST HUNTSMAN OF THE KING OF NAVARRE.

On leaving the king, Marguerite went at once to the apartment of the maids of honor.

On the way she took with her her physician, Chirac, who slept at the château, and with him entered the room of poor Fosseuse, who, pale, and surrounded by inquisitive looks, was complaining of pains in her stomach, without being able, so acute was her suffering, to answer any question or accept any consolation. At this time Fosseuse was twenty or twenty-one years old. She was a tall, beautiful girl, with blue eyes, blond hair, and a supple figure full of indolence and grace; but for three months she had not gone out, and had complained of a lassitude which prevented her from rising; she had reclined on a folding-chair and from the folding-chair had finally passed to her bed. Chirac began by dismissing the assistants, and taking possession of the invalid's bedside, he remained alone with her and the queen.

Fosseuse, frightened by these preliminaries, to which the two countenances of Chirac and the queen, the one impassible and the other frozen, could not but give a certain solemnity, raised herself on her pillow, and stammered her thanks for the honor which the queen her mistress had done her.

Marguerite was paler than Fosseuse; wounded pride is more painful than cruelty or illness.

Chirac felt the pulse of the young girl, but it was almost in spite of herself.

"What do you feel?" he asked her after a moment's examination.

"Pains in my stomach, monsieur," replied the poor child; "but it will amount to nothing, I assure you, and if only I had quiet" —

"What quiet, mademoiselle?" asked the queen, and Fosseuse burst into tears.

"Do not grieve, mademoiselle," continued Marguerite, "his majesty begged me to visit you to soothe your mind."

"Oh! what kindness, madame!"

Chirac dropped the hand of Fosseuse.

"I know now what your trouble is," said he.

"You know?" murmured Fosseuse, shivering.

"Yes, we know that you must be suffering a very great deal," added Marguerite.

Fosseuse continued to grow frightened at being thus at the mercy of two overmastering forces, science and jealousy.

Marguerite made a sign to Chirac, who left the room. Then Fosseuse's fear turned into trembling; she almost fainted.

"Mademoiselle," said Marguerite, "although for some time you have acted towards me as towards a stranger, and although I am informed every day of the ill turns which you do me with my husband" —

"I, madame?"

"Do not interrupt me, I beg you. Although, in short, you have aspired to a position much above your ambition, the friendship that I bear you, and that I have given to all my maids of honor, urges me to help you in the trouble in which we find you at present."

"Madame, I swear to you" —

"Do not deny; I already have too many griefs. Do not ruin first your honor and then mine — I, who have almost as much interest as you in your honor, since you belong to me. Mademoiselle, tell me everything, and in this I will be to you as a mother."

"Oh! Madame! Madame! do you believe what they say, then?"

"Take care not to interrupt me, mademoiselle, for it seems to me that time presses. I want to tell you that at this moment Monsieur Chirac, who knows your malady, — you remember the words which he spoke just now, — that at present Monsieur Chirac is in the antechamber, where he is announcing to every one that the contagious disease of which they are talking in the country is in the palace, and that you are threatened with being attacked by it. However, if there is still time I will take you to Mas d'Agenois, which is a remote house of the king, my husband; there we shall be alone, or almost alone. The king, on his part, is about to set out with his followers on a hunt, which he says will keep him away several days. We will not leave Mas d'Agenois until after your confinement."

"Madame! Madame!" cried Fosseuse, crimson with shame and grief, "if you credit everything that is said about me, let me die in misery."

"You respond but poorly to my generosity, mademoiselle, and you also count too much on the friendship of the king, who has begged me not to abandon you."

"The king? The king said" —

"Do you doubt it, when I tell you, mademoiselle? If I did not see the symptoms of your real malady, if I did not guess from your suffering that the crisis is approaching, I might perhaps believe in your denial."

Just then, as though to decide in favor of the queen, poor Fosseuse, overwhelmed by the pains of intense suffering, fell back on her bed, livid and panting.

Marguerite watched her a few minutes without anger, but also without pity.

"Must I still believe in your denials, mademoiselle?" said she at last to the poor girl, when the latter was able to rise, showing, as she did so, a face so agitated and so bathed in tears that it would have softened Catharine herself.

At that moment, and as if God had tried to send help to the wretched girl, the door opened and the King of Navarre entered hurriedly.

Henry, who had not the same reasons for sleeping as Chicot, had not slept. After having worked an hour with Mornay, and having, during that hour, made all his plans regarding the hunt which he had so pompously announced to Chicot, he had hurried to the summer-house of the maids of honor.

"Well! what do they say?" said he, entering, "that my Fosseuse is still suffering?"

"Do you see, madame," cried the young girl at sight of her lover, and made stronger by the aid which had come to her, "do you see that the king has said nothing, and that I do right to deny?"

"Monsieur," interrupted the queen, turning to Henry, "have this humiliating struggle cease, I beg of you; I believe I understood that your majesty had honored me with your confidence, and had revealed mademoiselle's condition. Tell her, therefore, that I know everything, so that she may not allow herself to doubt when I affirm."

"My child," said Henry, with a tenderness which he did not even attempt to conceal, "you persist in denying, then?"

"The secret does not belong to me, sire," replied the courageous girl, "and so long as I have not received permission from your lips to tell everything" —

"My child Fosseuse has a brave heart, madame," replied Henry; "pardon her, I implore you; and you, my child, have every confidence in the kindness of your queen. The gratitude is my concern, and I will take charge of it."

And Henry took Marguerite's hand and pressed it with warmth. At that moment a sharp spasm of pain again seized the young girl; she gave way a second time beneath the tempest, and, bent like a lily, she bowed her head with a dull and painful groan.

Henry was touched to the depths of his heart when he saw the pale brow, the swimming eyes, the damp, dishevelled hair; when, in short, he saw on the temples and lips of Fosseuse that sweat of anguish which seemed bordering on agony.

Thoroughly distracted, he rushed towards her with open arms.

"Fosseuse, dear Fosseuse!" he murmured, falling on his knees before the bed.

Marguerite, gloomy and silent, pressed her burning forehead against the window-panes.

Fosseuse had the strength to raise her arms and put them around her lover's neck; then she laid her lips on his, thinking that she was about to die, and that in this last, this supreme kiss, she was sending forth to Henry her soul and her farewell. Then she fell back unconscious. Henry, as pale as she, inert and voiceless like herself, let his head fall forward on the sheet of her bed of agony, which seemed so nearly becoming a shroud.

Marguerite approached the group, in which were mingled physical pain and moral suffering.

"Rise, monsieur, and let me finish the task which you have imposed on me," said she, with majestic strength. And as Henry seemed anxious at this manifestation and half rose to his knee:

"Oh, fear nothing, monsieur," said she; "since my pride alone is wounded, I am strong. Against my heart I would not have answered for myself; but fortunately my heart has nothing to do in all this."

Henry raised his head.

"Madame?" said he.

"Do not add a word, monsieur," said Marguerite, extending her hand, "or I shall believe that your indulgence has been calculated. We are brother and sister; we understand each other."

Henry led her to Fosseuse, whose icy hand he placed in Marguerite's feverish one.

"Go, sire, go," said the queen, "start on your chase. Just now the more attendants you take with you, the more inquisitive people you will remove from the bedside of — mademoiselle."

"But," said Henry, "I saw no one in the antechambers."

"No, sire," replied Marguerite, smiling, "they think that the plague is here; hasten, therefore, to leave, and take your pleasure elsewhere."

"Madame," said Henry, "I will go, and will hunt for both of us."

And he threw a last tender glance at Fosseuse, still unconscious, and rushed from the room.

Once in the antechamber he shook his head as though to throw the remains of anxiety from his brow; then, his face beaming with that sly smile which was peculiar to him, he ascended to the apartment of Chicot, who, we have said, was sleeping with clinched fists.

The king opened the door, and shook the sleeper in his bed.

"Well! well! pal," said he. "Quick! quick! it is two o'clock in the morning."

"Ah! the devil!" said Chicot; "you call me 'pal,' sire Did you mistake me for the Duc de Guise?"

In fact, Henry, when he spoke of the Duc de Guise, was in the habit of calling him "pal."

"I take you for my friend," said he.

"And you make me a prisoner; me, an ambassador! Sire, you violate the rights of man."

Henry began to laugh. Chicot, before all else a man of wit, could not help keeping him company.

"You are mad. Why the devil did you wish to go away from here? Are you not well treated?"

"Too well, *ventre de biche!* too well. I seem to be like a goose which is being fattened in a poultry-yard. Every one says to me: 'Little, little Chicot, how cunning he is!' but they clip my wings, and shut the door on me."

"Chicot, my child," said Henry, shaking his head, "reassure yourself; you are not fat enough for my table."

"Well! sire," said Chicot, rising, "I find you very lively this morning; what news, then?"

"Ah! I am going to tell you. I am leaving for the chase,

you see, and I am always very gay when I go hunting. Come, out of bed, comrade, out of bed!"

"What! you take me with you, sire?"

"You shall be my official historian, Chicot."

"I am to keep account of the shots fired?"

"Exactly."

Chicot shook his head.

"Well! what is the matter?" asked the king.

"This," replied Chicot; "that I have never seen such gayety without anxiety."

"Bah!"

"Yes, it is like the sun when it" —

"Well?"

"Well, sire, rain, lightning, and thunder are not far away."

Henry stroked his beard with a smile and replied:

"If a storm comes, Chicot, my cloak is wide, and you will be under cover."

Then advancing towards the antechamber, while Chicot dressed himself, murmuring the meantime:

"My horse!" cried the king; "and let Monsieur de Mornay be informed that I am ready."

"Ah! it is Monsieur de Mornay who is the first huntsman of the chase?" asked Chicot.

"Monsieur de Mornay is everything here, Chicot," replied Henry. "The King of Navarre is so poor that he has not the means to divide his charges into specialties. I have only one man."

"Yes, but he is good," sighed Chicot.

CHAPTER LIV.

HOW THEY HUNTED THE WOLF IN NAVARRE.

Chicot, casting his eyes over the preparations for departure, could not help remarking in a low tone that the hunts of the King of Navarre were less sumptuous affairs than those of King Henry of France.

Twelve or fifteen gentlemen only, among whom he recognized Monsieur le Vicomte of Turenne, the object of the matrimonial contests, formed the entire suite of his majesty.

Furthermore, as these gentlemen were rich only on the surface, as they had not large enough revenues to make useless and even occasional useful expenditures, almost all, instead of the hunting costume used at that time, wore a helmet and cuirass. This made Chicot ask if the wolves of Gascony had muskets and artillery in their forests.

Henry heard the question, although it was not directly addressed to him; he approached Chicot and touched him on the shoulder.

"No, my son," said he, "the wolves of Gascony have neither muskets nor artillery; but they are fierce beasts, with claws and teeth, and they lure the hunters into thickets where they run great risk of tearing their clothes on the thorns; now, they might tear a coat of silk or of velvet, and even a jacket of cloth or of leather, but they could not tear a cuirass."

"That is a reason," growled Chicot, "but not a very good one."

"What would you have?" said Henry, "I have no other."

"I must be satisfied with this, then?"

"That is what you had best do, my son."

"Very well."

"That was a 'very well' which savors of internal criticism," said Henry, laughing; "you are angry with me for having troubled you to go hunting?"

"Faith, yes."

"And you find fault?"

"Is it forbidden?"

"No, my friend, no; fault-finding is current money in Gascony."

"Well! you understand, sire, I am no hunter myself," replied Chicot, "and I must certainly occupy myself with something, I, a poor idler, who has nothing to do, while the rest of you are anticipating the flavor of the good wolves you are going to hunt with your twelve or fifteen followers."

"Ah! yes," said the king, again smiling satirically, "the clothes first, now the number; rail, rail, my dear Chicot."

"Oh, sire!"

"But I will observe to you that you are not indulgent, my son; Béarn is not as large as France. There the King always rides with two hundred huntsmen; here I set out with twelve, as you see."

"Yes, sire."

"But," continued Henry, "you will think that I am bragging, Chicot, but sometimes a thing happens here which does not happen there: sometimes here, country gentlemen, learning that I am going hunting, leave their houses, their châteaus, and their homes and join me; this sometimes makes a very passable escort for me."

"You see, sire, that I have not the good fortune to be here at such a time," said Chicot; "truly, I am having a run of ill luck."

"Who knows?" replied Henry, with his bantering laugh.

Then as they had left Nérac, cleared the gates of the town, and had been riding for almost half an hour in the country:

"See," said Henry to Chicot, raising his hand to his eyes to make a shade for them; "see, I am not mistaken, I think."

"What is it?" asked Chicot.

"Look yonder at the gates of the town of Moiras; are those not horsemen whom I see?"

Chicot raised himself in his stirrups.

"Faith, sire, I think so," said he.

"And I am sure of it."

"Horsemen, yes," said Chicot, looking with more attention; "but hunters, no."

"Why not hunters?"

"Because they are armed like Roland and Amadis," replied Chicot.

"Well! what difference do the clothes make, my dear Chicot? You have already learned by seeing us that the clothes do not make the hunter."

"But," exclaimed Chicot, "I see at least two hundred men there."

"Well? what does that prove, my son? That Moiras gives good service."

Chicot felt his curiosity sharpened more and more. The troop which Chicot had numbered at the lowest figure, for it consisted of two hundred and fifty horsemen, joined the escort silently; each of the men who composed it was well mounted and well equipped, and the whole was commanded by a good-looking man who rode up and kissed Henry's hand with courtesy and devotion.

They forded the Gers; between this river and the Garonne in a bend of ground they came upon a second troop of a hundred men; the leader approached Henry and seemed to make

excuses for not bringing him a larger number of hunters. Henry accepted his apologies and held out his hand to him.

They continued to ride and came to the Garonne; as they had crossed the Gers, so they crossed the Garonne; but as the Garonne is deeper than the Gers, when two-thirds way across they got beyond their depth, and had to swim for a distance of thirty or forty feet; yet contrary to all expectation, they reached the opposite bank of the river without accident.

"By Heaven!" said Chicot; "what exercises are you doing, sire? When you have bridges above and below Agen, you soak your cuirasses in water in this way!"

"My dear Chicot, we are savages, and must therefore be forgiven. You well know that my late brother Charles called me his wild boar; now, the wild boar — not being a hunter, you do not know this — now, the wild boar never goes out of his way; he goes straight along. Bearing his name, I imitate him; I incommode myself no more than he does. A river appears on my way, I cross it; a city rises before me, *Ventre Saint Gris!* I devour it like a pie."

This facetiousness of the Béarnais caused loud bursts of laughter from those around him. Monsieur de Mornay alone, still by the side of the king, did not laugh audibly; he merely compressed his lips, which, with him, was an indication of excessive hilarity.

"Mornay is in a very good humor to-day," said the Béarnais joyfully, into Chicot's ear; "he has just laughed at my joke."

Chicot asked himself at which of the two he ought to laugh; at the master, so happy to have made his servant laugh, or at the servant, so difficult to divert. But, more than all else, the base of Chicot's thoughts was astonishment.

On the other side of the Garonne, about half a mile from the river, three hundred horsemen, hidden in a pine forest, appeared before Chicot's eyes.

"Oh! oh! my lord," said he in a low tone to Henry; "are not these jealous people who have heard your chase spoken of, and who intend to oppose it?"

"No," said Henry, "you are mistaken again this time, my son; these men are friends who have come to us from Puymirol; true friends."

"By Heaven! sire, you will have more men in your suite than you have trees in the forest."

"Chicot, my child," said Henry, "I think, God forgive me,

that the news of your arrival has already spread through the country, and that these men are running from the four corners of the province to do honor to the King of France, from whom you come as ambassador."

Chicot had too much intelligence not to perceive that already for some time they had been making fun of him. He took umbrage at it, but not ill humor.

The day ended at Monroy, where the gentleman of the country, assembled as though they had been informed in advance that the King of Navarre was to pass, offered him a fine supper, of which Chicot did his share with enthusiasm, as they had not thought it necessary to stop on the way for a thing of such slight importance as dinner, and as consequently they had not eaten since they had left Nérac.

They had reserved for Henry the most beautiful house in town; half the troop slept in the street in which the king was; the rest outside the gates.

"When shall we begin to hunt?" asked Chicot of Henry, as the latter was having his boots taken off.

"We are not yet in the territory of the wolves, my dear Chicot," replied Henry.

"And when shall we be there, sire?"

"Anxious?"

"No, sire; but, you understand, one likes to know where one is."

"You shall know to-morrow, my son; in the meantime, go to sleep there, on the cushions at my left; see, there is Mornay already snoring at my right!"

"The deuce!" said Chicot; "he is more noisy asleep than awake."

"Yes, that is so," said Henry, "he is no prattler; but it is at the chase that he must be seen, and you shall see him."

Daylight had scarcely appeared when a loud sound of horses awoke Chicot and the King of Navarre. An old gentleman, who wished to serve the king himself, brought Henry the honey bread and the spiced wine of the morning. Mornay and Chicot were waited on by the servants of the old gentleman.

The meal over, the signal to saddle was given.

"Come, come," said Henry, "we have a long day's work before us to-day; to horse, gentlemen, to horse!"

Chicot saw with astonishment that five hundred horsemen

had increased the escort. These five hundred horsemen had arrived during the night.

"Ah!" said he, "it is not a suite that you have, sire, it is not even a troop; it is an army."

Henry replied merely by these three words:

"Wait awhile, wait."

At Lauzerte six hundred men on foot ranged themselves behind this troop of horsemen.

"Foot-soldiers!" cried Chicot; "foot-soldiers!"

"Beaters!" said the king, "nothing but beaters."

Chicot frowned, and from that moment he spoke no more.

Twenty times his eyes turned towards the country, that is to say, twenty times the idea came to him to run. But Chicot had his guard of honor, without doubt, by right of his being ambassador of the King of France. The result was that Chicot was so well recommended to this guard, as a personage of the greatest importance, that he did not make a gesture without this gesture being repeated by ten men.

This displeased him, and he spoke about it to the king.

"Well!" said Henry, "it is your fault, my child. You tried to escape from Nérac, and I am afraid you want to escape again."

"Sire," replied Chicot, "I give you my word as a gentleman that I will not even try."

"Very good."

"Moreover, I should be wrong."

"You would be wrong?"

"Yes; for by remaining, I am destined, I think, to see curious sights."

"Well! I am glad that this is your opinion, my dear Chicot, for it is mine also."

At that moment they were riding through the town of Montcuq, and four small field-pieces took their place in the army.

"I return to my first idea, sire," said Chicot, "that the wolves of this country are master wolves, and that they are treated with respect unknown to ordinary wolves; artillery for them, sire!"

"Ah! you have noticed?" said Henry; "it is a mania with the men of Montcuq; since I gave them for their exercises these four pieces which I purchased in Spain, and which were smuggled in, they drag them everywhere."

"Shall we arrive to-day, sire?" murmured Chicot.

"No, to-morrow."

"To-morrow morning or to-morrow evening?"

"To-morrow morning."

"Then," said Chicot, "it is at Cahors that we are to hunt, is it not, sire?"

"It is in that direction," said the king.

"But why, sire, did you, who have infantry and cavalry and artillery to hunt the wolf, — why did you forget to bring the royal standard? the honor you do these worthy animals would then have been complete."

"We did not forget it, Chicot, *Ventre Saint Gris!* we were careful not to; but we leave it in its case for fear of soiling it. But since you want a standard, my child, to know under what banner you are marching, we will show you a fine one. Take the standard from its case," commanded the king. "Monsieur Chicot wants to know how the arms of Navarre are embroidered."

"No, no, it is needless," said Chicot, "better leave it where it is; it is all right there."

"Then do not worry," said the king; "you will see it at the right time and place."

They spent the second night at Catus almost in the same way as they had passed the first. From the moment Chicot had given his word of honor not to escape they paid no more attention to him.

He made a tour of the town and went as far as the advanced posts. From all sides troops of one hundred, one hundred and fifty, and two hundred men joined the army.

That night was the rendezvous of the foot-soldiers.

"It is very fortunate that we are not going as far as Paris," said Chicot, "we should reach there with a hundred thousand men."

The following morning, at eight o'clock, they came in sight of Cahors with one thousand foot-soldiers and two thousand cavalry. They found the city in a state of defence; scouts had alarmed the country; Monsieur de Vesin had at once taken precautions.

"Ah! ah!" said the king, to whom Mornay communicated this news, "we are forestalled; this is annoying."

"We must make a regular siege, sire," said Mornay; "we still expect almost two thousand men, that is as many as we need, at least to counterbalance the chances."

"Let us assemble the council," said Monsieur de Turenne, "and begin the trenches."

Chicot watched everything and listened to all these words with a terrified air.

The pensive and almost pitiful look of the King of Navarre confirmed him in his suspicions that Henry was a poor soldier, and this conviction alone somewhat reassured him.

Henry had allowed every one to speak and during the discussion of various suggestions he had remained as silent as a fish.

Suddenly he emerged from his revery, raised his head, and in a commanding tone:

"Gentlemen," said he, "this is what must be done. We have three thousand men, and you are expecting two thousand, you say, Mornay?"

"Yes, sire."

"That will make five thousand in all; in a regular siege they will kill a thousand or fifteen hundred in two months; the death of these will discourage the others; we shall be obliged to raise the siege and to retreat; in retreating we shall lose a thousand others; this will be the half of our forces. Let us sacrifice five hundred men at once and take Cahors."

"How do you mean, sire?" asked Mornay.

"My dear friend, we will go straight to the gate which is nearest to us. We will find a ditch on our way; we will fill this with branches; we will leave two hundred men on the ground, but we will reach the gate."

"And then, sire?"

"Then, the gate reached, we will blow it up with petards, and take possession. It is no more difficult than that."

Chicot, thoroughly frightened, looked at Henry.

"Yes," he growled, "coward and boaster, here is indeed my Gascon; is it you, tell me, who will place the petard under the gate?"

At that instant, as though he had heard Chicot's aside, Henry added:

"Let us not lose time, gentlemen, the meat will grow cold; let us go forward, and let those who love me follow me."

Chicot approached Mornay, to whom he had not had the time to address a single word during the whole journey.

"Tell me, Monsieur le Comte," whispered he into his ear, "do all of you want to be cut to pieces?"

"Monsieur Chicot, we need that to put us in good training," replied Mornay, calmly.

"But the king will be killed!"

"Bah! his majesty has a good cuirass."

"Besides," said Chicot, "he will not be such a fool as to enter the fight, I presume?"

Mornay shrugged his shoulders and turned his back on Chicot.

"Well," said Chicot, "I like him much better asleep than awake, when he is snoring than when he is speaking; he is more polite."

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